

Report of the Secretary General

Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to note the report of the Secretary General.

1. This report covers the work of the Secretariat from the publishing of the Report of the Secretary General to the 57th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC57) on 18 April 2019, through to 30 March 2020. This report provides both an overview and selected highlights of the work completed during this period.
2. This past year, as the first year of the current triennium, has been an important period for the Convention, as both Contracting Parties and the Secretariat have been taking actions to implement the decisions taken at the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP13) and at SC57. The Secretariat continues its commitment to strengthen its work to effectively deliver on its mandate specified in Article 8 of the Convention, to implement the instructions given to it by the Conference of the Contracting Parties and the Standing Committee, and to support Parties to implement the Strategic Plan of the Convention. Importantly, the Secretariat is taking assigned actions on Resolutions adopted by COP13 and decisions of SC57 as the basis of its work plan. The main areas of work during the reporting period are described in this report, and documents prepared for the present meeting (SC58) provide further detail on various areas of the Secretariat's work.
3. In January 2020, the Secretariat reviewed progress made in 2019 on completing the actions identified in the 2019-2021 work plan as approved by Decision SC57-21 and to identify the activities specific to 2020 that will result in achievement of the identified indicators. The review confirmed that considerable progress has been made during the first year of the triennium in completing the desired results identified across the functional areas included in the work plan approved by the Standing Committee. The 2019-2021 work plan now serves as the basis for the development of individual work plans for all staff and in evaluating staff performance. The 2020 work plan presented to SC58 for approval, in document SC58 Doc.16, can be viewed here: <https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc58-doc16-work-plan-of-the-secretariat-for-2020>.

Strengthening service to Contracting Parties' decision-making and accountability

4. The delivery of the Secretariat's core role of servicing Contracting Parties remains a priority, and includes the organization of meetings of governing and subsidiary bodies and accountability in all the work of the Secretariat to implement decisions and requests of the Contracting Parties. This area of work has thus continued to be prioritized in the current triennial work plan. The work plan explicitly refers to the requests made by Contracting Parties to the Secretariat to enhance accountability of the Secretariat.

5. A critical function of the Secretariat is the organization of meetings of governing and subsidiary bodies of the Convention, including the COP, the Standing Committee and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP).
6. A major highlight was the organization of SC57, including associated meetings of its working groups, which took place from 24 to 28 June 2019 in Gland, Switzerland. The meeting was attended by 109 participants, with representatives of 49 Contracting Parties and 13 observer organizations. The Secretariat prepared the documents for the meeting, supported the work of the Committee's working groups in advance of and at the meeting, organized logistical aspects, and prepared daily reports and the final report. The Secretariat team worked in a coordinated manner with clear roles and responsibilities to support the meeting. Contracting Parties expressed satisfaction with the planning and management of SC57, as evidenced by the results of a satisfaction survey completed by meeting attendees. Fifty-nine percent of participants indicated they were "very satisfied" with how the meeting was managed, and 41% indicated they were "satisfied". Important improvements in the management of this meeting included utilizing the new Constituent Relationship Management (CRM) platform for registration and on-site printing of badges, with both the badges and the lanyards made out of recyclable materials. The meeting was paperless, supporting the twin aims of reducing meeting costs and operating in a more environmentally responsible manner. Based on feedback from Parties and lessons learned, standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the planning and management of future Standing Committee meetings have been completed. These SOPs have been followed in the preparation and management of SC58.
7. As a follow-up to SC57, the Secretariat has provided support in implementing the decisions taken at the meeting. An important activity has been to support working groups established by COP13 and SC57, including specific tasks given by SC57. The Secretariat has organized teleconferences, prepared meeting agendas and minutes, secured and managed consultancies that support the working groups and assisted in the preparation of reports and documents presented to SC58. Support has been provided to the following groups:
 - i. Effectiveness Working Group – The Secretariat managed the tender and contracting for the consultant, and has administered a survey to all Contracting Parties on behalf of the Working Group and provided administrative support to the consultant as requested by the Working Group.
 - ii. Review of the Strategic Plan Working Group – The Secretariat supported the Working Group in developing the terms of reference (TORs) for a consultant and managed the tender and contracting. The Secretariat administered a survey to all Contracting Parties, STRP members and International Organization Partners (IOPs) on behalf of the Working Group. The Secretariat has arranged several virtual meetings of the Working Group and provided summary reports of the calls.
 - iii. Observer Status Working Group – The Secretariat has facilitated several calls of the Working Group and provided summary reports. Additionally, the Secretariat supported the Working Group in developing its TORs and has managed the tender for and contracting of a consultant to undertake the legal review requested in Decision SC57-14.
 - iv. Working Group on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) – With guidance from Contracting Parties the Secretariat prepared an updated draft RRI report template and supported its

review by the Working Group. The Legal Advisor prepared an analysis on the legal status of RRs as requested in Decision SC57-29.

- v. The Secretariat sought guidance from and supported the work of the Management Working Group on STRP matters, including the implementation of the STRP work plan, the appointment of the new STRP Chair, the cancellation of STRP23 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the decision to advance the highest priority STRP tasks virtually thereafter. The Secretariat has sought guidance from the Executive Team on the preparation of meetings of the governing and subsidiary bodies of the Convention and on various administrative matters. The Report of the Executive Team and Chair of the Standing Committee to SC58, published as document SC58 Doc.5, can be viewed here: <https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc58-doc5-report-of-the-executive-team-and-chair-of-the-standing-committee>.
8. Support to the STRP over this reporting period included:
- i. Facilitating progress with the delivery of highest-priority tasks in the 2019-2021 STRP work plan by assisting with the development of TORs for tasks, as well as helping with the identification, selection and contracting of consultants to support the STRP with aspects of these tasks, with guidance from the Management Working Group¹. The Secretariat also finalized the revision and further editing of outstanding outputs from the 2016-2018 triennium, namely Ramsar Technical Report No.10: *The use of Earth Observation for wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring* and Briefing Note No. 10: *Wetland restoration for climate change resilience*.
 - ii. Preparing guidelines for authors to assist STRP members with the preparation of outputs for the Convention. The guidelines summarize the process of drafting and production, and provide guidance on the structure, target audiences and style of outputs.
 - iii. Facilitating participation of the STRP Chair at relevant meetings (the seventh session of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES7, 29 April-4 May 2019); and the 15th Technical Committee meeting of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA TC15, 9-11 April 2019)).
 - iv. Supporting the Management Working Group in the process of selecting and appointing a new STRP Chair in accordance with Resolution XII.5, following the resignation of the former STRP Chair on 21 November 2019, and ensuring that STRP work continued under the interim leadership of the STRP Vice-Chair. The new STRP Chair, Professor Guangchun Lei, was appointed on 13 March 2020.
9. The Secretariat supported the CEPA Oversight Panel by facilitating four teleconferences and distributing a survey to Contracting Parties. With support from the Secretariat, the Oversight Panel has prepared a document for SC58 that articulates the Panel's recommendation for

¹ The highest priority tasks (as designated by SC57) include: (1) Global Wetland Outlook: special edition for the 50th anniversary of the Convention on Wetlands; (2) Task 1.2: Compiling and reviewing positive and negative impacts of agricultural practices 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: Elaborating on practical experiences of restoration methods for tropical peatlands; (4) Task 5.1: Desktop study of coastal blue carbon ecosystems in Ramsar Sites (consistent with relevant IPCC guidelines).

moving towards a new approach. The Report, document SC58 Doc.15.1, can be viewed here: <https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc58-doc151-report-of-the-cepa-oversight-panel>.

10. The Secretariat has been actively preparing the meetings of the bodies of the Convention scheduled for 2020 and 2021. Preparatory work has been underway for SC58, originally scheduled for 22-26 June 2020 and postponed to 26-30 October as decided by the Standing Committee, including the timely preparation of meeting documents. Importantly, the Secretariat has engaged with the Standing Committee to identify issues that require time-sensitive decisions and ways to address these using virtual means.
11. The Secretariat is actively engaging with the host of COP14. From 3 to 5 December 2019, Secretariat staff visited potential venues in Wuhan and had meetings with the Head of the Administrative Authority of China and Wuhan Municipal Government on preparations for COP14 including possible dates, meeting agenda, meeting requirements and logistics as well as the host country agreement. A follow-up planning meeting scheduled for 3 February 2020 in Beijing was cancelled because of the outbreak of COVID-19. On 4 March, representatives of the host country and the Secretariat held a teleconference, during which issues related to COP14 preparation were discussed, including its timing, venue, theme and programme, and the organization and work of the COP14 Subgroup.
12. As instructed in Resolution XIII.4 on *Responsibilities, roles and composition of the Standing Committee and regional categorization of countries under the Convention*, Contracting Parties requested the Secretariat to review previous Resolutions and decisions, identifying those or parts of those, if any, that may no longer be valid or applicable, that contradict each other, or are otherwise inconsistent with current Convention practices. As instructed by SC57, the Secretariat carried out a preliminary grouping of existing Resolutions into major thematic areas. With guidance from a group of interested Parties, the Secretariat contracted a consultant to prepare a draft of a consolidated resolution on “inventories” as a pilot study. A proposed approach to consolidating past Resolutions and a sample draft consolidated resolution is presented to Parties for consideration in document SC58 Doc.13, at <https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc58-doc13-review-of-all-previous-resolutions-and-decisions>.
13. In support of the implementation of Resolution XIII.1 on *World Wetlands Day*, the Secretariat has been assisting a group of interested Contracting Parties under the leadership of Costa Rica in developing a draft resolution for the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and supporting talking points. The Secretariat has arranged regular calls of the group and provided summary reports of the calls.
14. The Secretariat has taken action on Resolution XIII.6 on *Language strategy for the Convention* and, via the Ramsar Exchange email list, has encouraged Contracting Parties to provide translations of the most important Ramsar information documents into their own official languages and to make them publicly available on their national Ramsar websites. Additionally, the Secretariat has invited Parties to provide translated Ramsar documents of wider relevance, so that the Secretariat can publish them on the Convention’s website. The number of documents in languages other than English, French and Spanish on the Convention website has increased from 168 to 197.
15. The Secretariat has made efforts to enhance its performance in strengthening services to support Contracting Parties’ decision-making and accountability. The support provided for meetings of the governing and subsidiary bodies of the Convention has been standardized,

including overall planning, logistics and documentation as reflected in SOPs for Standing Committee meetings, STRP meetings and meetings of Conference of the Parties. A whole-of-Secretariat approach has been used in developing these SOPs with specific allocation of roles and responsibilities to each staff member during the meetings of these bodies.

16. Utilization of the new CRM system enabled more efficient management of mailings, Standing Committee meeting registration and ensured compliance with new European privacy laws. The CRM has brought together all contact information managed by the Secretariat into a single database. It is now being used for all correspondence with Contracting Parties and management of meetings including SC57 and SC58. For SC58 document preparation the Secretariat piloted a new project management tool called Basecamp. This tool allows Secretariat staff to follow individualized timelines and work plans for the preparation of documents, and enables real-time tracking of progress, document sharing among multiple contributors and early identification of potential bottlenecks.
17. However, the Secretariat sees some challenges to the delivery of this important function. A main concern is the number of meetings that the Secretariat may be instructed to organize in 2021 before COP14. The Secretariat previously raised this issue during the year leading up to COP13. Potential meetings in 2021 could include STRP24, three Standing Committee meetings (including one immediately before and one immediately after COP14), five regional pre-COP meetings and COP14. This situation is further compounded by the postponement of SC58, leaving less time between this meeting and COP14. As presented in document SC58 Doc.20.4 on *Process for preparation and review of draft resolutions*, the Secretariat suggests that Parties reconsider how best to organize regional discussions of draft resolutions and in the longer term to consider how other Conventions have simplified their decision-making processes.

Increasing relevance of wetlands and the Convention to global sustainable development policy objectives

18. The Secretariat continues to strengthen its work in supporting international cooperation and enhancing the relevance of wetlands and the Convention in the global policy agenda. Given that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the ongoing negotiation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework are driving national and international planning and funding efforts, increased attention has been paid to ensure that wetlands and the work of Contracting Parties under the Convention contribute to these policy frameworks.
19. The Secretariat continues to actively engage in discussions regarding achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including as co-custodian of SDG Indicator 6.6.1 (on change in extent of water-related ecosystems), as instructed in Decision SC53-17. The Secretariat participated in the tenth meeting of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), which took place from 21 to 24 November 2019 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The most important outcome of this meeting was the set of recommendations on the 2020 comprehensive review of proposals for modification of the global SDG indicators framework. As part of the review, there were no modifications for Indicator 6.6.1. The Secretariat also submitted a Convention acceleration action entitled “Wetland inventories to support Contracting Parties to achieve Indicator 6.6.1” to the SDGs knowledge platform under SDG 6 “Water and Sanitation”.
20. In line with Resolution XIII.7 on *Enhancing the Convention’s visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions* and Decision SC57-

47 on wetland inventories, the Secretariat is working with Contracting Parties to complete and refine information on wetland extent that was submitted in National Reports. The Secretariat is also developing a toolkit for use by Contracting Parties that includes best practices and addresses the identified gaps in knowledge through the provision of guidance, support and resources including Earth observation tools to complete wetland inventories and report on wetland extent. A detailed description of the activities undertaken to support Contracting Parties on wetland inventories and reporting on wetland extent is provided in Standing Committee document SC58 Doc.9 at <https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc58-doc9-urgent-challenges-to-the-wise-use-of-wetlands-to-receive-enhanced-attention-best>.

21. The Secretariat has been active in supporting the achievement of SDG 14 (“Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”). The Secretary General is one of the two focal points for the Community of Ocean Action on Mangroves, and the Secretariat has thus participated in the preparatory meeting of the Communities of Ocean Action for the second UN Ocean Conference and in the meeting of the SDG 14 Communities of Ocean Action on marine and coastal ecosystems, coral reefs and mangroves. These meetings took place in Incheon, Republic of Korea, in May and November 2019.
22. The Secretariat has been actively engaged in supporting the achievement of SDG 15 (“Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss”) and the biodiversity agenda. The Secretariat continues to strengthen its engagement with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). In 2019, the Secretariat participated actively in the CBD’s preparatory process for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Main highlights include:
 - i. The Secretariat and six Standing Committee representatives participated in the consultation workshop of biodiversity-related Conventions in Bern, Switzerland, from 10 to 12 June 2019. At this meeting, the Secretary General delivered a statement on behalf of the eight biodiversity-related Conventions. The Secretariat also participated in the thematic consultations for the post-2020 framework on marine and coastal biodiversity, capacity building and unlocking financial resources for nature-based solutions.
 - ii. The Secretariat participated in a post-2020 expert group on communications on 21 and 22 November to develop a communications strategy for the lead-up to CBD COP15 and in support of the implementation of the post-2020 framework. Outcomes of the meeting included formation of a “flotilla” of organizations interested in biodiversity and an agreed mechanism to share and support the communications plans and assets of the different organizations. Importantly, the “flotilla” provided support and outreach for the Convention’s 2020 World Wetlands Day materials and messages. Other outcomes of the meeting included a plan to increase the visibility of biodiversity during 2020 and the lead-up to CBD COP15, and the preparation of media talking points.
 - iii. At the margins of the SDG Summit in September 2019 in New York, the Secretary General participated in the 25th Senior Officials Meeting of the United Nations Environment Management Group (EMG), which focused on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. The Secretary General highlighted the importance of wetlands and the critical contributions of the Convention to the framework.
23. The Secretariat continues to participate actively in the Biodiversity Liaison Group (BLG). The Secretary General participated in the 14th ordinary meeting of the BLG (26-27 September 2019)

in Cambridge, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, with a major focus on engagement in the process for the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and cooperation and synergies among the biodiversity-related Conventions.

24. Also related to biodiversity, the Secretariat participated in the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) from 15 to 22 February 2020, in Gandhinagar, India. CMS COP13 marked the first in a series of international biodiversity conferences in 2020, which will culminate with the UN Biodiversity Conference in Kunming, China, initially scheduled in October 2020 and postponed to a date to be defined. At the high-level segment on migratory species conservation in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, the Secretary General emphasized the critical role of wetlands for migratory species and the relevance of the Convention in implementing the post-2020 framework, as well as the ongoing collaboration between the two Conventions. She also participated in a special meeting convened by the Ministry of the Environment of India regarding progress and best practice in implementing the Convention on Wetlands at the national level. Before COP13, the Secretariat participated in an event organized by CMS on connectivity and the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, from 11 to 13 November 2019, in Bonn, Germany.
25. Given the critical role played by wetlands in climate change mitigation and adaptation, the Secretariat has engaged on this issue, including:
 - i. The Secretariat participated in COP25 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), held in Madrid, Spain, in December 2019. Secretariat staff participated in a workstream on adaptation, attended meetings and participated as panellists in two side events. The COP was also an opportunity to engage with relevant stakeholders in identifying opportunities to better integrate wetlands in climate change measures.
 - ii. The Secretariat, as part of the Global Peatlands Initiative, provided support to Germany to host a workshop in May 2019 to explore synergies among multilateral environmental agreements regarding the role of peatlands in supporting achievement of the SDGs, which resulted in a list of priorities for collaboration. It also engaged in a meeting organized in October 2019 by CMS to explore further synergies for peatlands among MEAs and to develop a coherent narrative, involving the Secretariats of the Convention of Wetlands, UNFCCC, UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), CMS, AWEA, CBD and UNEP.
26. The Secretariat participated in the 14th meeting of UNCCD COP14, from 2 to 13 September 2019 in New Delhi, India. Among other inputs, the Secretariat made a statement in the high-level segment on the interlinkages between wetlands and land degradation, climate change and biodiversity loss.
27. The Secretariat also actively engaged on the water agenda (SDG 6), with the following main highlights:
 - i. The Secretariat engaged in World Water Week, which took place from 25 to 30 August 2019 in Stockholm, Sweden, with the aim of raising the visibility of the role of wetlands in ensuring water availability and quality, and access to water by all. The Secretary General participated as a panellist in the high-level panel hosted by the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management / UNDP-SIWI Water Governance Facility, and the Convention's delegation participated in events on "Freshwater Biodiversity: Linking Biodiversity with

Inclusive Development to Achieve the 2030 Agenda” and “Locking Carbon in a Water Vault: Wetlands as Ecosystem-based Mitigation”.

- ii. The Secretariat is participating in the process to develop the UN World Water Development Report (WWDR) 2021 with the aim of giving more visibility and relevance to the role of wetlands in water management. This has included participating in a workshop organized from 19 to 20 September 2019 in Perugia, Italy, to define the scope, content and structure of the WWDR 2021 and distribute tasks among lead agencies and contributing agencies.
28. The Secretariat has begun developing guidelines to assist Contracting Parties to mainstream gender in their work in wetland conservation and wise use in support of implementation of Resolution XIII.18 on *Gender and wetlands* (SDG 5). The Secretary General is one of the International Gender Champions (IGC), a network of ambassadors and heads of agencies established initially in Geneva, Switzerland, and now active in other cities. The Secretary General has implemented her commitment to this initiative throughout the reporting period, and participated in the network’s activities including its annual meeting to review progress during 2019 and priorities for 2020. The Secretariat is also making adjustments in its systems so that it can better promote and report on gender balance in the delegations to meetings of governing and subsidiary bodies of the Convention.
29. The Secretariat continues to seek to strengthen its relationship with the Geneva-based Permanent Missions to the United Nations and UN agencies. The Secretariat had planned a briefing for the Permanent Missions on the linkages between wetlands and the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and on important issues in the SC58 agenda. The briefing scheduled for April 2020 was cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The Secretariat will plan a future briefing once the situation warrants.
30. Other processes in which the Secretariat engaged include:
- i. Resolution XIII.8, on *Future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention for 2019-2021*, calls for the development of thematic requests to IPBES for its future work programmes. The Secretariat sent a notification to Contracting Parties, STRP National Focal Points and IOPs about recent developments with IPBES processes, inviting them to participate in these, including by nominating experts for thematic assessments and participating in the first external reviews. The Secretariat renewed the Memorandum of Cooperation with IPBES in November 2019, extending it for the duration of the IPBES 2030 rolling work programme.
 - ii. The Secretariat attended the InforMEA annual meeting held on 11-14 June 2019 in Montreux, Switzerland. As the project moves into its third phase, the meeting provided an opportunity to reflect on a decade of work and obtain the MEA members’ guidance on defining priorities for the next few years.
 - iii. The Secretariat engaged in an event at the third meeting of the Parties to the Minamata Convention, held on 25 November 2019, in Geneva, on the links between biodiversity and the chemicals agenda, with a focus on the role of wetlands in addressing pollution and health.
 - iv. The Secretariat supported the Secretariat of the CITES Convention at its COP18, held from 17 to 28 August 2019, in Geneva. Following previous practice of collaboration and lesson

learning on operational matters, the Secretariat seconded its Information Technology (IT) Officer and its Documentation Officer to the CITES Secretariat during COP18. The CITES Secretariat had seconded a Documentation Officer to the Convention on Wetlands COP13 in Dubai in October 2018.

31. In fulfilment of its mandate, the Secretariat continues its engagement with relevant MEAs and UN processes. However, a major challenge remains the fact that the Secretariat does not have access to the UNGA, nor in the UN Economic and Social Council, the UN platform for debate on sustainable development. A proposal to get observer status was submitted by Uruguay, then Chair of the Standing Committee, in 2017, but its consideration has been deferred. The Secretariat has continued to face limitations to its engagement in the UN, most notably in the High Level Political Forum and during the Summits organized at the UNGA in September 2019. The Secretariat participated as part of the IUCN delegation and encountered additional challenges related to the limitation of passes to access events and meeting spaces. There is also a limitation to participate in the water agenda, which is coordinated across the UN system by UN-Water. Unlike other MEAs, the Convention on Wetlands is not a “member” of UN-Water, as it is not part of the UN system. The Secretariat can only contribute as a “partner”, which implies limitations to its engagement.
32. At SC54, in Decision SC54-07, the Standing Committee “instructed the Secretariat, in conjunction with interested Parties, to continue exploring options for gaining access to meetings of the United Nations General Assembly and related high-level fora”. Through Decision SC55-12 it instructed the Secretariat with support from an informal group of interested Contracting Parties to bring forward a structured proposal for consideration at SC57. The Standing Committee at that meeting established the Observer Status Working Group and agreed on the preparation of an analysis of different options on the legal status of the Secretariat. Accordingly, the Observer Status Working Group held three virtual meetings in 2019 and requested the Secretariat to retain a consultant to complete the legal analysis. This work is ongoing and the Working Group will report to SC58.

Strengthening support and enabling implementation

33. During the reporting period, the Secretariat provided support to the designation of 47 new Wetlands of International Importance and the update of information for 71 existing Ramsar Sites. This included support in transfer of data into the Ramsar Sites Information System (RSIS), and publication and translation of Site summaries.
34. The Secretariat carried out three Ramsar Advisory Missions (RAMs): to Italy (Laguna di Venezia: Valle Averte, together with UNESCO World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS); Papua New Guinea (Kutubu Lake) and the Russian Federation (Kurgalsky Peninsula). The Secretariat is currently developing SOPs for the administration of RAMs to seek more coherent approaches and efficiencies in their preparation and completion and ensure that Contracting Parties can fully benefit from the collective knowledge and experience developed in this important area of the Secretariat’s work.
35. The Secretariat supported the work of Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) including the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet), the Nordic Baltic Wetlands Initiative (NorBalWet), the RRI for the Conservation and Wise Use of the Plata River Basin, of High Andean Wetlands, and of Mangroves and Coral Reefs, and the Ramsar Regional Centres for East Asia (RRC-EA) and for Central and West Asia (RRC-CWA). Advice was provided to all Regional Initiatives in the submission of annual reports to SC58. The Secretariat participated in a

workshop on wetland policy dialogue on the Lower Mekong Region, which was jointly hosted by the Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative (IBRRI) and RRC-EA. Support was also provided to the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), including through the participation of the Secretary General in the event to celebrate its 10th anniversary, where she delivered a keynote address on wetland conservation.

36. The Secretariat continues to support different capacity-building needs of Contracting Parties and is further developing virtual approaches to reach an increasing number of Contracting Parties with gains in efficiencies. On 24 March 2020, the Secretariat hosted two webinars providing guidance for Parties on accessing funding from the Green Climate Fund (GCF) for national wetland conservation projects. One hundred and seven individuals participated. The Secretariat supported the organization of a workshop from 16 to 20 September for Eastern and Southern African Parties on utilizing Earth observation as a tool for wetland management. The workshop was hosted by Zambia with funding from the German Ministry of Environment. RSIS training webinars in all languages of the Convention are scheduled for the later part of May.
37. The Secretariat continues to work to identify strategic partnerships to enhance support to Contracting Parties at scale. In this regard, the Secretariat is collaborating with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to identify and support countries where nature-based solutions, and wetlands in particular, can be included in Nationally Determined Contributions. The Paris Agreement established a process for Parties to submit their NDCs in 2020 for the next five-year cycle. UNDP has an initiative to support countries in the development of their NDCs so this is an important opportunity to promote the engagement of the Convention on Wetlands' National Focal Points (NFPs) to include wetlands in their NDCs as nature-based solutions thus gaining support for their conservation and access to climate change resources. The Secretariat and UNDP are developing a webinar to be delivered in 2020 that aims to create linkages and synergies between the Convention on Wetlands' NFPs and the NDCs process.
38. The Secretariat continues to strengthen collaboration with the IOPs. Periodic teleconferences between the partners are held to review implementation of the Joint Activities for Collaboration in the renewed Memorandum of Cooperation. As part of World Wetlands Day 2020, the Secretariat co-hosted with WWF International a panel discussion on wetlands and biodiversity at the Ministry of Ecology in Paris, France. The event was organized together with Danone and the French Water Partnership. Key speakers at the event included the Secretary General, the Head of the Administrative Authority for France, the CEO of Danone, the President of the French Water Partnership and the Special Envoy for International Water Affairs for the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Other activities in this period included a joint World Wetlands Day statement, a joint press release on the importance of wetlands in addressing biodiversity loss, and organizing side events together at CMS COP13 and at the upcoming IUCN World Congress.
39. The Partnership Agreement with Danone concluded in December 2019 and a no-cost extension was accorded until June 2020 to finalize all pending activities. During the extension period the Secretariat and Danone will undertake a review of the Partnership, with the clear objective to assess and frame the elements of a future collaboration that is aligned to the priorities of the Convention, cognizant of the changes in the funding priorities of Danone. Since 1998, Danone has funded the development of communication materials for World Wetlands Day and the Ramsar Awards, in particular the cash prize of USD 10,000 awarded to each Award winner. The Secretariat has prepared a funding proposal for World Wetlands Day and is approaching potential donors. The Secretariat requests support from Contracting Parties in identifying potential donors for World Wetlands Day 2021 and the Ramsar Awards 2021.

40. The Resource Mobilization Work Plan has been updated to reflect the new non-core funding priorities identified in Annex 3 of Resolution XIII.2 on *Financial and budgetary matters*. A database that lists organizations from the public and private sectors that fund wetlands projects was launched at SC57 and continues to be updated (see <https://contacts.ramsar.org/funding-organizations>). The Secretariat encourages Contracting Parties to use the database and to communicate news on funding opportunities that can be added. In addition, a guide for writing conservation project proposals is now available on the website (at <https://www.ramsar.org/document/introduction-to-planning-and-writing-conservation-project-proposals>) to support Parties in writing project proposals in response to the request made at SC57. As of 31 December 2019, CHF 379K has been secured to support the non-core funding priorities identified in Annex 3 of Resolution XIII.2.
41. As part of its commitment to provide resource mobilization support to Contracting Parties, the Secretariat together with WWF international, through funding provided by Danone, is developing a module on opportunities and mechanisms to unlock financing for wetland conservation. This module is part of a broader training programme on approaches to leverage public and private sector engagement for the conservation of wetlands, building on the successful webinars on the GCF mentioned above.

Enhancing the visibility of wetlands and the Convention

42. The visibility of wetlands and the Convention is being increased through a variety of communications outreach efforts. The Secretariat has strengthened information sharing among the stakeholders of the Convention and has increased public awareness about wetland services and benefits through the Convention's website, social media, newsletter, and outreach campaigns such as World Wetlands Day and other international days. The Secretariat has taken an approach of speaking with "one voice" across the Secretariat to our target audiences about wetlands issues and linking wetlands to relevant policy frameworks such as the SDGs, the Paris Agreement and the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. During the reporting period, 215,000 users visited the Convention website. All Convention social media platforms have seen a steady increase in engagement over the past year. Twitter and Instagram are the fastest growing channels, with audience increases of 13% over the past year. Currently the Convention's Twitter account has 18,500 followers, Instagram over 4,600 and Facebook 151,000. The Convention newsletter, disseminated every three or four months, is also now a well-established means of communication between the Secretariat and Contracting Parties.
43. The *Global Wetland Outlook* continues to be a resource and reference in regards to the state of the world's wetlands and their services to people. It is frequently referenced in academic literature, media stories, dialogues, and presentations about wetlands. Since its release, the *Global Wetlands Outlook* website (at <https://www.global-wetland-outlook.ramsar.org/>) has had over 21,000 visitors.
44. The Secretariat with the assistance of Media Measurement conducted an analysis of the global "conversation" about wetlands in social and mainstream media. The analysis was conducted for the purpose of developing insights that can inform more effective positioning of wetlands and ongoing communications about wetlands by the Secretariat and Contracting Parties, as well as the development of a 50th anniversary theme. These insights coupled with the advice of a communications expert retained to assist in the development of a 50th anniversary theme have been incorporated into a PowerPoint presentation shared with the CEPA Oversight Panel, the STRP and the COP14 host country (Chair of the COP14 subgroup) to assist Parties in identifying a

50th anniversary theme that will provide a chapeau for a year-long campaign that will engage and activate a range of partners and stakeholders to take action to conserve, protect and restore wetlands.

46. The Secretariat continues to update and enhance the website at www.ramsar.org, so that it better serves the needs of Contracting Parties and other users. The annual update of the website (all website pages) was completed in February. A tender for a new hosting service was completed and all aspects of the website have been migrated to the new host. The new infrastructure significantly enhances the speed and reliability of the website. A new “quick search” function is being introduced that will provide clear and easy access to core Convention documents in the three official languages.
47. World Wetlands Day continues to be a powerful outreach platform from which to raise global and national awareness about wetlands. The Secretariat, with funding from Danone, produced a range of information materials to support the outreach efforts by countries in 2020 under the umbrella theme of “wetlands and biodiversity”. These materials were made available for Parties to download on the World Wetlands Day website. In addition, on the same website, Parties registered their planned activities on a map of events, thus giving visibility to the global reach and national interest of the day. A total of 1,535 events were registered for the 2020 campaign.
48. The Wetland City Accreditation programme has proven effective in enhancing the visibility of wetlands and the Convention. A webpage on the Convention website has been created that features the programme and recognizes the cities accredited at COP13. As instructed by Resolution XII.10, the Secretariat notified Contracting Parties of the nomination process for the current triennium and received 25 applications by the nomination deadline of 15 March 2020. The Secretariat has transmitted all received nominations to the Independent Advisory Committee for their review in advance of the 15 April 2020 deadline. The Secretariat participated in the first meeting of the IAC in Suncheon City, Republic of Korea, from 25 to 27 September, and contributed to discussions on how the scheme can be improved consistent with the instructions provided by Resolution XII.10 and subsequent Standing Committee decisions.
49. Key challenges for the Secretariat in enhancing the visibility of wetlands and the Convention are the limited resources and capacity to undertake communication and outreach activities. The Secretariat is addressing this challenge by focusing its efforts on providing communications tools and assets for Parties and other organizations to use, leveraging communications for events such as World Wetlands Day, the Wetland City Accreditation scheme and the 50th anniversary, and pursuing strategic engagement with IOPs and other organizations such as the biodiversity “flotilla” that have the ability to raise the visibility of wetlands and the Convention.

Strengthening the Secretariat’s efficiency and effectiveness

50. The guiding objective of the Secretary General continues to be to “organize to deliver” on the Strategic Plan of the Convention and the mandate of the Contracting Parties, and to use the limited resources of the Convention and the capacities of the Secretariat in the most efficient way.
51. Considerable improvements have been made in enhancing the efficiency of financial processes. Payment processing times have been reduced by 50% from approximately 11 days to six. Furthermore, there has been a decrease in accruals from CHF 156K in 2018 to CHF 71K in 2019, since invoices for 2019 services have been collected in a timely manner. Process efficiencies

have been achieved through the use of secure electronic signatures and processing and archiving of digital copies of documents.

52. Work continues in ensuring that the capacity of staff meets the requirements of the key functions of the Secretariat as identified in the 2019-2021 work plan approved by SC54. Adjustments have been made to the job descriptions of current and vacant posts to strengthen coverage of and attention to these functions. This includes reclassifying the vacant position of Director of Resource Mobilization and Communications, taking into account the competencies available in the Deputy Secretary General position, to a Resource Mobilization Officer position to ensure that the resource mobilization responsibilities of the Secretariat continue to be carried out in an efficient manner. During the process of recruitment for vacant posts, efforts are being made to ensure that competencies align with these functional requirements and that regional and gender diversity is achieved to the extent possible. Currently, 52% of Secretariat staff are women.
53. Technologies and business practices that can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Secretariat continue to be actively evaluated and adopted. Utilization of the new CRM system is enabling more efficient management of mailings, meeting registration and contacts, and allowing compliance with new privacy laws. The CRM has brought together all contact information managed by the Secretariat into a single database. It is now being used for all correspondence with Contracting Parties and management of meetings including COP13, SC57, SC58 and STRP23. Integration with the main website and the RSIS ensures consistency of contact information across these systems. As mentioned above, for SC58 the Secretariat piloted a new tool for document management called Basecamp that resulted in more efficient and timely management of documents. The use of the CRM has resulted in considerable efficiencies in operational processes with implications in the use of staff time, thus contributing to better using existing resources.
54. A professionally facilitated planning workshop for the Secretariat, conducted in January 2020, focused on reviewing progress made during the first year of the triennium. The new streamlined format organized around the key functions has proven useful in enabling the Secretariat to focus on assigned activities, deliverables and outcomes that have been identified by the Contracting Parties as being most critical to the effective implementation of the Convention. Considerable progress has been made during the period of this report in carrying out the instructions provided by Parties. During this workshop, Secretariat staff identified the actions and activities specific to 2020 that will result in achievement of the identified indicators. The 2020 workplan has been published as document SC58 Doc.16 and can be viewed here: <https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc58-doc16-work-plan-of-the-secretariat-for-2020>.
55. The mandatory gender equality and mainstreaming training for Secretariat staff called for in Resolution XIII.18 was completed in December 2019. A two-day training session tailored to the needs of Secretariat staff was delivered by IUCN's gender office. Planning is currently underway to provide gender training to Standing Committee members at SC58 as called for by the Resolution.
56. Considerable progress has been made in strengthening the Secretariat's efficiency and effectiveness and in filling gaps in its capabilities. The team has worked hard in this regard with encouraging results in key areas of work of the Secretariat as described in this report. However, further work is still needed. Some important challenges have been identified in relation to the legal status of the Secretariat, including access to strategic global fora, signing donor contracts and talent acquisition and retention. The Working Group on the Observer Status established by

Decision SC57-14 has requested a legal analysis and will report accordingly to SC58. Also, moving towards a whole-of-Secretariat approach has presented challenges as this requires changes in ways of working and organizational culture within the Secretariat and in its engagement with Contracting Parties. The Secretariat is developing additional SOPs that will contribute to making further progress. Other areas for further work include: continuing to develop more coherent and coordinated approaches across the team to achieve efficiencies and better serve Contracting Parties across all regions; balancing enhanced accountability for implementation of the decisions taken by the COP and Standing Committee with the service provided to Contracting Parties in each region; and continuing to build the needed capabilities, capacities and skills in core functional areas of the Secretariat's work.