

## Report and Decisions of the 59th Meeting of the Standing Committee

**Tuesday 22 June 2021**

**13:00 – 16:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee**

### Agenda item 1: Opening statements

1. Opening statements were made by:
  - H.E. Eng. Mohamed Al Afkham, Chair of the Standing Committee;
  - Mr. Stewart Maginnis, Global Director of the Nature-based Solutions Group, IUCN;
  - Mr. Chris Rostron, International Engagement Manager, WWT, on behalf of the six International Organization Partners (IOPs); and
  - Ms Martha Rojas Urrego, Secretary General of the Convention.

### Agenda item 2: Adoption of the provisional agenda

2. The Secretariat introduced the provisional agenda in document SC59 Doc.2 Rev.1, noting that consensus on items for consideration had been previously reached by the Standing Committee on most matters with the exception of: Review of the Rules of Procedure; Review of all previous Resolutions and decisions; and Draft resolutions submitted by Contracting Parties. With respect to draft resolutions submitted by Contracting Parties, it was noted that the matter could either be addressed at the current meeting or at a future face-to-face meeting. One Party had proposed to reopen Post-SC58 Intersessional Decision 10 (SC58 Doc.20.4.Rev.5) by which the Standing Committee had previously approved the process for the preparation and review of draft resolutions.
3. Participants supported limiting the scope of the agenda to time-sensitive matters, given the limited time available, to those matters on which consensus had been reached, and excluding other items.
4. Interventions were made by China, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Finland, Japan, Mexico, Sweden and Uruguay.

**Decision SC59-01: The Standing Committee adopted the provisional agenda in document SC59 Doc.2 Rev.1, excluding those items contained in square brackets.**

Agenda item 3: Adoption of the provisional working programme
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5. The Secretariat introduced the provisional working programme in document SC59 Doc.3, noting that with the adoption of the provisional agenda, items scheduled for discussion on Thursday 24 June would no longer be addressed.
6. In discussion proposals were made to allocate the time freed up to the Subgroup on Finance to allow it to complete its work. It was agreed that some flexibility should be retained in the working programme to allow other matters to be addressed, should the need arise.
7. Interventions were made by Australia, Mexico, Japan, Republic of Korea, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

**Decision SC59-02: The Standing Committee adopted the provisional working programme in document SC59 Doc.3, amended to make provisional allowance for a further meeting of the Subgroup on Finance on Thursday 24 June, if required.**

Agenda item 4: Admission of observers
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8. The Secretariat outlined the key paragraphs of document SC59 Doc.4 *Admission of observers*.

**Decision SC59-03: The Standing Committee admitted the observers listed in document SC59 Doc.4.**

9. The Chair gave the floor to the Legal Advisor to present an overview of the legal opinion requested by the Strategic Plan Working Group concerning the authority of the Standing Committee in the establishment of Working Groups. She reported that she had been unable to find an specific impediment to the Committee establishing a new working group to prepare the fifth Strategic Plan, although the current SPWG must still satisfy the requirements of Resolution XIII.5 with regards to the revision of the fourth Strategic Plan etc.

Agenda item 7: Report of the Management Working Group
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10. The Secretariat introduced document SC59 Doc.7 *Report of the meeting of the Management Working Group of 14 June 2021*.
11. The Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel noted that the Panel intended to produce a draft resolution addressing CEPA governance and another presenting a new approach to CEPA.
12. The Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel emphasized that the STRP had focused on and largely completed its four highest priority tasks (production of a revised Global Wetlands Outlook; wetlands and sustainable agriculture; peatland restoration; and wetlands and blue carbon), noting that some work was still needed to complete the revised edition of the GWO. Attention was now turning to addressing ad-hoc advisory tasks.
13. Regarding data to support Ramsar Criterion 6 on waterbird populations, Wetlands International noted that most such estimates were now out of date, having last been revised in 2012. However Wetlands International was shortly to launch a new portal, supported by the Abu Dhabi environment agency, which is intended to help fill existing gaps.

**Decision SC59-04: The Standing Committee requested the Secretariat to finalize the Global Wetlands Outlook in close consultation with the STRP, for launch in 2021 in association with the commemoration of the Convention's 50th Anniversary.**

**Decision SC59-05: The Standing Committee instructed the STRP to complete the ad-hoc task on Criterion 6, in line with the guidance provided by the Management Working Group, taking a narrow interpretation of the request made and focusing closely on the need of Contracting Parties for concrete, practical information on available data and guidance on its application.**

**Decision SC59-06: The Standing Committee encouraged the STRP to continue its work on blue carbon, in line with the current work plan, and to consider additional tasks within the current work plan that were not identified as high priority tasks as well as any relevant emerging issues, to develop its work plan for the coming year.**

**Decision SC59-07: The Standing Committee requested the STRP to undertake discussion and analysis with a view to further developing STRP priorities for the coming triennium.**

Agenda item 5: Report of the Executive Team and Chair of the Standing Committee
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14. The Chair of the Standing Committee introduced document SC59 Doc. 5.
15. A Party suggested that the annual assessment of the Secretary General might be included in the terms of reference of the Executive Team published as Annex 8 to the Report and Decisions of SC57<sup>1</sup>, and that the impacts and consequences of holding virtual or "hybrid" Standing Committee meetings might be assessed. The Party also underlined the importance of Parties supporting the STRP and the CEPA Oversight Panel in their work under the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 situation.
16. The Chair of the Standing Committee explained that he had carried out his role of assessing the Secretary General in cooperation with the relevant IUCN staff and in accordance with IUCN procedures. The Secretariat reported that it would be providing a report on attendance at SC59 and would be surveying participants' levels of satisfaction with the meeting as in previous meetings of the Standing Committee. The Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel reported that the pandemic had not had financial implications for the Panel.

**Decision SC59-08: The Standing Committee noted the Report of the Executive Team and Chair of the Standing Committee published as document SC59 Doc.5, and the preceding report published as document SC58 Doc.5.**

Agenda item 20.1: Report of the Subgroup on COP14
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17. The Chair of the Subgroup on COP14 introduced the Subgroup's report published as document SC59 Doc. 20.1, noting that the Subgroup had unanimously agreed to postpone the COP until 2022, and that the host country, China, was proposing 21 to 29 November 2022 as suitable dates. The host country proposed a venue for 1,000 participants. The Subgroup had decided that the selection of Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award winners was not time-sensitive and recommended that it be deferred until the next Standing Committee meeting in 2022. The Subgroup also noted that final approval of the dates of COP14 as well as approval of the Secretariat budget for 2022 would require the holding of an extraordinary meeting of the COP.

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/sc57\\_report\\_decisions\\_e.pdf](https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/sc57_report_decisions_e.pdf)

18. Committee members expressed concern regarding the proposed limit to the number of attendees and sought clarification on how this would be put into practice. Members of the Committee weighed the importance of ensuring maximum attendance and full participation of Contracting Party delegations against that of optimizing the participation of IOPs and other civil society partners. The environmental benefits of reducing participant travel by including virtual elements within the event were weighed against the value of face-to-face discussions where possible, given the difficulties of remote participation due to time zones and other factors. The possibility of streaming the event for the benefit of remote audiences was noted.
19. One Party suggested to include the selection of the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award winners at the current meeting, should time allow. The Chair of the Standing Committee requested that the Chair of the Subgroup on COP14 consult with the Subgroup members and report back to the Standing Committee in order to inform a decision.
20. The Secretariat reminded the Standing Committee of the process contained in the Rules of Procedure for convening an extraordinary COP, noting that it had to receive a request from at least one Contracting Party. Once such a request was received one third of Parties (57) must support the request within six months. From the date that this requirement is met, the meeting must be convened within 90 days. The Secretariat would share the dates, venue, provisional agenda and documentation within one month of the same date (Rules 4 and 5).
21. The Secretariat identified two possible periods for such a meeting: from 4 to 8 October and from 25 to 29 October. It did not expect the meeting to take up the entirety of such a period.
22. Interventions were made by Brazil, China, Dominican Republic, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America and WWT.

**Decision SC59-09: The Standing Committee took note of the Report of the Subgroup on COP14 published as document SC59 Doc.21.1.**

**Decision SC59-10: The Standing Committee approved 21 to 29 November 2022 as the proposed dates for COP14 and agreed to submit the new dates for COP14 to the extraordinary meeting of the COP to be held in 2021.**

**Decision SC59-11: The Standing Committee requested the host country and the Secretariat, in consultation with the Subgroup on COP14, to review options on the possible size of the meeting to take account of the comments of the Standing Committee members.**

Agenda item 18: Work plan of the Secretariat for 2021
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23. The Secretary General introduced document SC59 Doc.18, *Integrated Secretariat 2021 Annual Plan as part of the approved Triennial Plan for 2019-2021*, and referred to document SC59 Doc.6 *Report of the Secretary General* in reviewing the activities since the last meeting of the Standing Committee.. These documents emphasized the ways that the Secretariat had responded to the impacts of the pandemic, drawing attention in particular to the greatly increased use of internet-based solutions in its work in implementing the plan. For example, eight thematic and operational webinars had attracted over 930 participants from over 130 countries; the virtual event to celebrate World Wetlands Day had over 9,000 viewers. These approaches could be applied after the pandemic for efficient outreach. The considerable uncertainty created by the pandemic, along with intersessional decision-making processes of

the Standing Committee and other bodies, had necessitated constant reprioritization which had stretched the resources of the Secretariat team. The pandemic had also created significant challenges, in particular through the impact of home working on members of the Secretariat. As a result actions were being implemented to ensure the continued wellbeing of staff.

24. The efforts of the Secretariat in continuing to implement its work plan were widely praised, with several participants commending the increased use of internet technologies and encouraging its further development. The Secretary General confirmed that webinars had been recorded and published to enable continuing access, and that they may be repeated. There was also general agreement that the wellbeing of Secretariat staff was of paramount importance. Some expressed frustration that it had been difficult to keep abreast of important decisions, for example in discussions regarding the timing of COP14.
25. In response the Secretary General noted that intersessional decision-making was an iterative process and that as soon as decisions had been taken, the information was conveyed in diplomatic notes sent out to all Contracting Parties. In addition, pages had been created in the website with notifications and intersessional decisions. She stressed the important role of regional representatives to the Standing Committee to get input from and provide feedback, including informal, to Contracting Parties in their regions and that the Secretariat supported this work when requested. It was suggested that consideration could be given to the on-line posting of minutes from Executive Team meetings.
26. Members provided differing views on the roles of the Permanent Missions in Geneva in supporting implementation of the Convention in their countries. The Secretary General observed the interactions including briefings for Missions in Geneva and participation of Mission staff in Standing Committee meetings, and highlighted the value of Missions in certain interactions with Parties, for example to support the organization of the COP. She noted that it had not been possible to deliver the most recently planned briefing due to COVID-19 restrictions.
27. One member noted that the plan could usefully bring together activities including interaction with the Global Environment Facility (GEF).
28. Interventions were made by Finland, Japan, Mexico, Slovenia, Sweden, United Kingdom, the United States of America and Uruguay.

**Decision SC59-12: The Standing Committee took note of and approved the Integrated Secretariat Annual Plan 2021 as part of the approved Triennial Plan for 2019-2021.**