

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

Wednesday 23 June 2021

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

Follow up from previous day:
Mandate of working groups and decision on SC59 / SC60

1. The Legal Advisor provided further clarification regarding working groups. She reported that there were effectively two kinds of working groups: those established by the Standing Committee and those established by the COP. At its discretion, the Standing Committee could adjust the mandates and timelines of its own working groups but, under the existing Rules of Procedure, could not change those established by the COP (Rule 25.3.a.). She further noted that, as long as the procedures in the Rules of Procedure and in Resolution XIII.4 on *Responsibilities, roles and composition of the Standing Committee and regional categorization of Countries under the Convention* were followed, with Contracting Parties being notified at least three months in advance, there was nothing to prevent the Standing Committee from dividing a meeting into two parts, as it saw fit. This would, for example, allow the Effectiveness Working Group to complete its work without contravening Resolution XIII.3 on *Governance of the Convention*.
2. Support was expressed for adopting a pragmatic, flexible approach in response to the current extraordinary circumstances which would enable Working Groups to complete their tasks for COP14, although the view was also expressed that dividing the present meeting into two or more parts might set a confusing precedent.
3. Interventions were made by Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America.

Decision SC59-13: The Standing Committee decided that its present meeting (SC59) would be divided into two parts, the second part to be held in 2022 at a date to be determined, before the date established for COP14.

Follow up from previous day:
Participation in virtual meetings

4. The Secretariat reported on participation at the most recent Standing Committee meetings as follows:
 - SC57: 96 Contracting Party representatives from 48 Parties; 18 observers;

- SC58: 66 Contracting Party representatives from 34 Parties; closed session, no observers invited;
- SC58: 97 Contracting Party representatives from 39 Parties; 16 observers; 153 registered participants in total.

Follow up from previous day:

Report from the Chair of the Subgroup on COP14 on the Ramsar Conservation Awards

5. The Chair of the Subgroup on COP14 noted that a consultation by email had been carried out the previous evening and had received a unanimous response, namely that the Subgroup members had not had enough time to consider candidates put forward as possible recipients of the Ramsar Conservation Awards, and that the issue, not being time-sensitive, should be deferred until a later session of the Standing Committee. The Chair requested that the Secretariat inform those who nominated candidates for Awards of the new timeline.

Decision SC59-14: The Standing Committee decided to defer consideration of the Ramsar Conservation Awards to its next session, to be held in 2022.

Agenda item 17.3: World Wetlands Day themes for 2022-2024

6. The Secretariat informed the Committee that, despite the COVID-19 related restrictions, 1,100 World Wetlands Day events in 82 countries had been reported. It introduced document SC59 Doc 17.3 *World Wetlands Day themes for 2022-2024*, proposing as themes: “using wetlands wisely” (2022); “wetland restoration” (2023); and “wetlands and gender” (2024). Other suggestions for proposed for consideration were “wetlands and human wellbeing” and “nourishing our planet – wetlands and food”.
7. The themes for each year and the additional suggestions received widespread support. Linking the 2022 theme with that proposed for COP14 (“wetland action for people and nature”) was advocated, while the launch of the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration was also noted and that the forthcoming revision of the Global Wetland Outlook already had wetland restoration as a major theme. A number of observations were made along with suggestions for possible refinements and future themes, including: “wetlands and carbon”; “wetlands and sustainable food”; “wetlands and indigenous communities”; “wetlands and watershed management”; “wetlands and regional development”; “wetlands for everybody” (incorporating gender and other issues of inclusion); “citizen power – supporting wetland conservation”; and “youth exploring a new horizon of wetland conservation”.
8. Following discussion, the Secretariat proposed the following themes for the World Wetlands Days of 2022-2024:
2022: Wetland action for people and nature (linked to the theme for COP14)
2023: Wetland restoration (linked to the UN decade for ecosystem restoration)
2024: Wetlands and human wellbeing.
9. An update was provided by Costa Rica on the implementation of Resolution XIII.1 on *World Wetlands Day* concerning progress made in the submission of a draft resolution to the United Nations General Assembly inviting it to recognize 2 February of each year as International World Wetlands Day observed by the United Nations. The group of interested Contracting Parties urged all Parties to contact their Permanent Missions in New York to invite them to participate in a side event to be held at on 7 July at the margins of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, to support the submission of the resolution to the

General Assembly. The Secretariat stated that it would provide more information to all Contracting Parties once the event is included in the Forum's agenda.

10. Interventions were made by Argentina, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Japan, Oman, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America.

Decision SC59-15: The Standing Committee decided that the themes for forthcoming World Wetlands Days would be:

2022: Wetland action for people and nature

2023: Wetland restoration

2024: Wetlands and human wellbeing

Agenda item 10: Report of the Working Group on the Review of the Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention

11. The Chair of the Working Group introduced its report contained in document SC59 Doc.10, explaining that Australia had taken up the role following the sad death in September 2020 of the previous Chair, Mr. Paul Mafabi of Uganda. A summary of the history of the group, key tasks and processes was presented in two slides, which are included as Annex X to the present report. The Chair of the Working Group noted that the current strategic plan (SP4) would only run until 2024 and that the Group was proposing minimal refinement of the plan, drawing attention instead to a series of five proposed thematic annexes that the Contracting Parties could, if they wished, add to the plan at COP14. He further proposed the establishment of a new Working Group to begin development of the next strategic plan (SP5) to ensure consistency and continuity. He further noted that, of the budget allocated for the preparation of SP4, CHF18,000 remained unspent and proposed that this be reallocated for development of SP5. Advice from the Secretariat's Legal Advisor indicated that there was no impediment to the establishment of such a group, should the Standing Committee decide that this was appropriate.
12. During discussion, many participants expressed condolences to Mr. Mafabi's family, noting his long association with and achievements for the Convention. Some expressed a desire for a simpler, action-oriented Strategic Plan 5 while others raised concerns as to whether it was appropriate for the Standing Committee to establish a working group on Strategic Plan 5 without fuller input from the COP and amend the current Strategic Plan. They agreed that the Standing Committee had no mandate to alter the Strategic Plan 4, noting that COP14 could amend it if it so wished. Some comments were made concerning the scope of the thematic annexes.
13. The Working Group Chair further clarified that some of the annexes in the document such as Annex C on the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) reflected delays in other processes caused by the pandemic, and were intended to serve as place-holders.
14. Interventions were made by Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, Mexico, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States of America.

Decision SC59-16: The Standing Committee took note of the work of the Strategic Plan WorkingGroup; invited it to recommend to COP14 to amend SP4 by adding thematic Annexes that address emerging and other issues, noting that existing Annex 2 will be updated to map the Ramsar Targets with the post-2020 Biodiversity Goals and Indicators when available.

Decision SC59-17: The Standing Committee agreed that existing guidance and tools be communicated to Contracting Parties to support the implementation of SP4 in the gap year to COP14, subject to available capacity within the Secretariat.

Decision SC59-18: The Standing Committee noted that the working Group will prepare a draft Resolution about the review of the 4th Strategic Plan, proposed thematic annexes, and areas where new guidance could be progressed in the next triennium, and basic elements for the preparation of a proposed framework for Strategic Plan 5, indicating the key elements, for the Standing Committee meeting in 2022 ahead of COP14.

Decision SC59-19: The Standing Committee recommended that the Contracting Parties at COP14 extend the term of SP4 from 2024 until such time as COP15 may be held, in order to ensure continuity between successive Plans.