THE CONVENTION ON WETLANDS

59th Meeting of the Standing Committee

Gland, Switzerland, 21 – 25 June 2021

**SC59 Rep.3**

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

**Thursday 24 June 2021**

**13:40 – 16:00 Plenary Session** **of the Standing Committee**

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

1. The Chair of the Standing Committee summarized discussions from the previous day, noting that the Chair of the Working Group on the Review of the (Fourth) Strategic Plan had proposed that a new working group be established by the Standing Committee to start work on the Fifth Strategic Plan to come into effect in 2024.

2. In further discussion, concerns were raised on the relatively limited time available for any new working group to start its work and on the possibility that COP14 might adopt a different approach to the Fifth Strategic Plan, resulting in the formation of another working group to address the matter. It was generally agreed that having multiple or overlapping working groups addressing the strategic plan would not be necessary or desirable. In all cases, existing Working Group members should be encouraged to continue their work in any new group, to ensure as much consistency and continuity as possible, although it was also noted that the Standing Committee had no mandate to force Contracting Parties to join working groups.

3. A member noted that, as the CEPA Oversight Panel had not completed its work on a new approach to CEPA, it might be difficult for this to be incorporated into work on the Fifth Strategic Plan. In response, the Chair of the CEPA oversight panel noted that the CEPA Oversight Panel had effectively finished its work but had not yet drafted the related draft resolution. However the agreed text on the new approach to CEPA could be incorporated into a draft of the Fifth Strategic Plan.

4. The Chair of the existing Working Group proposed the text of a decision to the Standing Committee. This was agreed with a minor amendment to change a reference to “integrate” to “accommodate”.

5. Interventions were made by Australia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Slovenia, Sweden and the United States of America.

**Decision SC59-20: The Standing Committee established a new working group with membership from Contracting Parties, the STRP and International Organization Partners, to commence preparation of the fifth Strategic Plan (SP5) of the Ramsar Convention, with the terms of reference and work plan to be agreed intersessionally, and be designed to accommodate the key elements and any additional priority elements and modalities for SP5 that may be agreed at COP14. The Standing Committee encouraged the participation of members of the Working Group on the Review of the Fourth Strategic Plan in the new working group, for continuity purposes.**

Agenda item 21.1: Report of the Ramsar Regional Initiatives Working Group

6. The chair of the Working Group (Costa Rica) introduced the Group’s report contained in document SC59 Doc.21.1, and summarizied its work to date, specifically in addressing Resolution XIII.9. She noted that the work had proved relatively complex and challenging, and thanked the Secretariat for its support. A consultant, appointed through a tendering process, had been engaged to produce new operational guidelines, which had been the subject of an iterative review process. Agreement had been reached on most elements of the guidelines but some remained unresolved and were shown in square brackets in the current draft, which is included as Annex I to the draft resolution in the document. A small working group, comprising four Contracting Parties (Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama and Uruguay) had been established to prepare the draft resolution for consideration at the next session of the Standing Committee. The working group had completed its mandate, working in difficult circumstances, and had demonstrated how initial disagreements could be overcome through constructive dialogue.

7. Participants congratulated the Working Group on its efforts, though some noted that the current draft resolution contained some inaccuracies and inconsistencies. They trusted that work would continue to further refine the draft resolution before it was presented for consideration at the next session of the Standing Committee.

8. Concern was also expressed regarding the proposals for two new Ramsar Regional Initiatives, received in response to a request from the Secretariat sent out in July 2020. The question was raised as to why, as noted in paragraph 21 of document SC59 Doc. 21.2, only one of these proposals (in the Southern African Development Community region) had been recommended to the Standing Committee for endorsement. In response it was noted that any budget allocation for new RRIs would be addressed by the Subgroup on Finance, and that endorsement of any new RRIs would be addressed at the next session of the Standing Committee.

9. Interventions were made by Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America.

**Decision SC59-21: The Standing Committee took note of the progress report on the work of the Ramsar Regional Initiatives Working Group, and invited the Group to submit to its next session a draft resolution for the consideration of COP14 on Regional Initiatives, including new “Operational Guidelines for Ramsar Regional Initiatives to support the implementation of the Convention” to replace the Guidelines adopted through Decision SC52-16.**

Agenda item 11: Report of the Chair of the Effectiveness Working Group

10. The Chair of the Effectiveness Working Group (the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) introduced the Group’s report contained in document SC59 Doc.11, noting that, because of the pandemic, the Group had been unable to finish its work. Three reports relating to the governance of the Convention had been produced by a consultant and were included as annexes to the document. The final report contained recommendations made by the consultant on possible measures to enhance the effectiveness of the Convention. The Working Group was currently assessing these and, based on its deliberations, intended to submit a draft resolution to the next session of the Standing Committee for its consideration.

11. In the discussion it was noted that, as the consultant’s reports were long, some time would be needed for Contracting Parties to digest their contents. The Working Group was encouraged to continue its work and explore all options in making recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the Convention.

12. Interventions were made by China, Sweden and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

**Decision SC59-22: The Standing Committee took note of the report of the Effectiveness Working Group contained in document SC59 Doc.11.**

Agenda item 14: Report of the Working Group on Observer status in the United Nations   
General Assembly

13. The Chair of the Working Group introduced the Group’s report contained in document SC59 Doc.14, noting that it summarized the findings of a legal consultancy undertaken to explore options for enhancing participation in UN high-level fora and processes under the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The Working Group was in the process of analysing the financial implications of the different options outlined in the consultant’s report and intended to report back with final recommendations at the next session of the Standing Committee.

14. During discussion it was noted that informal consultations with members of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) had indicated that the Convention was likely to make little progress in obtaining observer status at that council until the question of its status at UNGA had been resolved.

15. One Contracting Party observer noted that a number of important events were scheduled to take place in the coming year, including COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, COP26 of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the IUCN World Conservation Congress (IUCN WCC). These all represent important opportunities for Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands to enhance the visibility of the Convention and promote the importance of wetland conservation through stakeholder dialogue. The risks to global freshwater would be an opening plenary theme of the IUCN WCC, which is to be held in Marseille, France, in September 2021. It was noted that the Secretary General would be a speaker at this event. Contracting Parties were urged to engage in this and other processes and work to ensure that the Convention’s goals are fully represented in the development of the post-2020 biodiversity framework. The observer asked that a copy of its full intervention be included as an annex to the present report (see Annex x).

16. Contracting Parties were further encouraged to seize every opportunity to ensure that wetland issues were raised in all relevant fora, and that their importance was not overlooked when text was being negotiated.

17. Interventions were made by France, Mexico, Slovenia and Switzerland.

**Decision SC59-23: The Standing Committee took note of the report of the Observer Status Working Group contained in document SC59 Doc.14, and recommended that the Working Group continue its work and report back at the Committee’s next session.**