Ramsar Convention on Wetlands: Review of Governance Structures and Procedures

Findings

Presented by SRI Executive: April 2020
Contents

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands: Review of Governance Structures and Procedures ................................................................. 1
Findings ..................................................................................................................................................................................... 1
1. Context ................................................................................................................................................................................. 3
Scope of Review .................................................................................................................................................................... 3
2. Methodology ......................................................................................................................................................................... 4
3. Summary of Findings of overall governance of Ramsar Convention according to assessment criteria ................................................................. 7
   3.1 Clarity .............................................................................................................................................................................. 7
   3.2 Legitimacy .................................................................................................................................................................... 8
   3.3 Accountability .............................................................................................................................................................. 9
   3.4 Effectiveness ............................................................................................................................................................... 9
   3.5 Costs ............................................................................................................................................................................ 10
4. Findings – Individual Governance Structures and Procedures .............................................................................................. 10
   4.1 The Conference of Contracting Parties ...................................................................................................................... 11
   4.2 Standing Committee .................................................................................................................................................... 16
   4.3 Management Working Group .................................................................................................................................... 19
   4.4 Executive Team .......................................................................................................................................................... 21
   4.5 Subgroup on Finance .................................................................................................................................................. 21
   4.6 Scientific and Technical Review Panel ....................................................................................................................... 23
   4.7 Communication, Education, Participation, and Awareness (CEPA) Oversight Panel ............................................. 24
   4.8 Secretariat ............................................................................................................................................................... 27
5. Next Steps .......................................................................................................................................................................... 30
Annex 1: Final Evaluation Questions ..................................................................................................................................... 32
1. Context

Providing a critical framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands, the Ramsar Convention and resulting organisation has ensured the provision of essential ecological services and freshwater supply since 1971. Promoting national action and international cooperation, Ramsar is the lead implementation partner on wetlands and contributes significantly to the Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on Biological Diversity and to climate change mitigation and adaption globally. Ramsar’s operating environment has shifted dramatically during its history, with more actors, intense competition for resources and the rise in importance of nexus and systems approaches to sustainable development, of which wetlands plays a critical role. This landscape has also seen significant progress in terms of innovation around alternative structures, business models, integration of new technologies and demonstration of value for money with measurable impact. The risks linked to water security are ranked as some of the highest threats to social and economic development, year after year. Being able to take swift, effective, coordinated and informed action is therefore essential for all organisations who seek to advance sustainable development.

With 171 Contracting Parties and nearing its 50th anniversary, this intergovernmental organisation and multilateral convention has made the decision to review its governance structure and processes to ensure it is fit-for-purpose with effective and efficient, legitimate and accountable decision-making processes, which demonstrate cost-effectiveness with modern work methods. Ramsar’s governance should support the Convention in implementing its vision and mission on the ground as well as raising its global profile to increase its impact.

Scope of Review

The 13th Conference of the Parties adopted Resolution XIII.3, acknowledging the importance of an adequate institutional set-up for Ramsar, formulating the Effectiveness Working Group (EWG) to review the governance structure with the assistance of an independent and neutral third party. Resolution XIII.3 was in response to deliberations and decision on the two draft resolutions put forward to COP 13 on the Ramsar Governance. SRI Executive was selected to support this review, for the purpose of recommending revisions (as necessary) that further enhance the effectiveness, including cost effectiveness, and efficiency of the Convention. As indicated in the minutes and documentation, this review occurs in a back drop of an external environment that is focused on demonstrating value for money, reducing inefficiencies plagued by administrative burden and slow processes in order to ensure organizations and Conventions are focused on achieving their critical missions. In addition to assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Convention, this review also includes proposing a process by which the Effectiveness Working Group can implement the recommendations they deem suitable, practical and impactful to enhance the functioning of Ramsar’s governance moving forward in support of the conservation and wise use of wetlands. This first report focuses on independently assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Convention’s structure and processes in relation to the strategic plans of the Convention, and will be followed by an analysis of comparable MEAs, in order for the EWG to obtain a holistic picture prior to formulating the “so what” and potential recommendations for implementation.

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1 Draft Resolutions 18.1 and 18.2.
It is noted that this review is not assessing the operational work, processes or impact of the Ramsar Convention as whole.

2. Methodology

Firstly, this review’s methodology has been designed to be truly participatory, noting the “ownership” of this review while independently carried out, is with the Effectiveness Working Group. Thus, as key stakeholders in this process, the EWG not only were informed of the methodology, but greatly contributed to it as well. This includes but is not limited to; the selection of the key informant interview sample, the key criteria, the survey and evaluation framework including the overarching evaluation questions (OEQ) and main evaluation questions (MEQ) this review sought to answer. The assessment criteria are defined in this report, and in line with international best practice, this review sought to understand the Clarity, Legitimacy, Accountability, Effectiveness and Cost Efficiency of Ramsar Convention’s Governance. This final evaluation framework and assessment criteria can be found in Annex 1: Final Evaluation Questions.

In order to ensure our independence, this review sought to triangulate, where possible and applicable, drawing on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis². Quantitative data is best collected with very clear yes or no questions or requests to rate or rank statements in order to show frequency of a specific finding, while qualitative data is best gained through open ended questions. The desk review provides clear findings as to express governance structures and processes. The 1:1 interviews were open ended questions, while the online survey posed both quantitative and open-ended questions. Triangulation is therefore achieved by using a mix of more than one method of gathering and analysing data against the same evaluation framework, to seek convergence and corroboration and to eliminate the inherent biases that could exist if we only used one method. Where possible in our findings by body, we have highlighted the % of interviews and survey respondents to demonstrate the level of evidence by modality, whilst not losing the nuance that bubbles to the surface when using multiple methods.

² https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/research/guides/methods/mixed_methods.htm?part=1
By utilising mixed methods, our team was also able to review the “what” against agreed upon criteria from both the desk research and quantitative survey responses, while using key informant interviews and open comments in the survey to better understand the context of why and how. In essence, this complementarity and use of different methods allowed the team to seek elaboration, enhancement, illustration and clarification with the results of the survey and evidence demonstrated in key literature. Integrating these sources throughout the different phases of our review process, SRI Executive were able to draw inferences from multiple sources, bringing together sometimes diverse perspectives from which to draw initial conclusions in context and understanding that these views may at times be subjective as processes are experienced by humans and thus, human behaviour. This approach is best practice in the field and draws upon both evaluation theory and change management approaches widely used in governance reviews and the implementation of any form of change within a system, including an intergovernmental organization.

In terms of sequence, SRI Executive first examined internal structures, drawing upon a desk review of the Convention’s significant documentation to review the scope and mandate of each subsidiary body as well as composition, reporting, structure and cost effectiveness (a full list of all documentation reviewed will be available in the Measures Report). Looking to understand how the structure comes to life, SRI Executive reviewed the Convention’s internal processes, examining key areas such as preparing and consolidating resolutions and how communications flow between and within bodies. As processes on paper may be experienced differently in practice, it is important to understand and assess ways of working, potential barriers and areas that influence the effectiveness and efficiency of Ramsar’s governance in reality. While this area in particular may not be as “scientific,” it is an important consideration as behaviours drive progress and thus, can inhibit effectiveness and efficiency in a governance context.

The graphic below shows an overall picture of how SRI Executive have gathered information about the Ramsar Convention. A full list of interviewees and documentation will be provided in the last report.
The table below shows the percentage of respondent CPs to the online survey per region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>No. of Countries</th>
<th>No. Responding Countries for online survey</th>
<th>No. Countries which held 1:1 Interviews</th>
<th>% Responses per Region for online survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America &amp; Caribbean</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>171</strong>³</td>
<td><strong>79</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong>⁴</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As aforementioned, the stakeholders that were invited to interview were considered and agreed with the EWG, as it was determined they were the most appropriate entry point to garner perspectives that would add value to this exercise. It is important to note that this set of interviews is meant to serve as a representative sample, geographically represented, of the Contracting Parties and it would be unusual to see a governance review that includes a majority or all CPs in order to draw initial findings or conclusions. SRI Executive supplemented these interviews with an open invitation to all CPs to complete a global survey, ensuring this process was inclusive and diverse, and most importantly, confidential. While collating and reviewing data in the back end of the survey tool, SRI also removed any duplicates to ensure fairness.

As follows, the scope of the review included the following bodies and processes: The Conference of the Parties (COP), Standing Committee (SC), subgroups, the Secretariat, the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), and CEPA Programme Oversight Panel. The review considered only the Ramsar Convention’s Governance structures, subsidiary bodies and governance processes, and not the Convention’s operations or impact performance.

³ The division of countries according to Ramsar Convention’s website.
⁴ 16 total interviews were undertaken to gain insight into the Contracting Parties’ views. 11 are included as country interviews while the additional 5 were undertaken with members of Ramsar’s governance.
3. Summary of Findings of overall governance of Ramsar Convention according to assessment criteria

As is experienced by many organizations spanning all institutional types, the documentation that creates good governance on paper and in concept, when examined beyond terms of reference and how governance operates in practice, potential obstacles or barriers to effectiveness often arise. This report seeks to unearth some of those areas, not in judgment terms, but where attention can be pointed to by the Effectiveness Working Group to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Ramsar’s governance. In many occasions, this includes responses from both quantitative and qualitative responses and what the evidence on paper looks like, to see where the differences potentially lie.

The overall assessment of the Ramsar Conventions is that the foundation of good governance exists in the Convention, Resolutions and Rules of Procedure, but it is the implementation of the Rules of Procedure, decisions and processes which are at times weak. The sections below summarise the overall review findings for each assessment criteria of clarity, legitimacy, accountability, effectiveness and cost in relation to the Ramsar Convention’s overall governance. Section 4 then details the assessment criteria in relation to each governance body.

3.1 Clarity

**CLARITY - Governance mandate, tasks and responsibilities for decisions and actions in the Convention are clearly delineated, allocated and accepted.**

Clarity is fundamentally important for good governance as ambiguity, overlapping mandates or gaps in essential governance functions cause confusion for stakeholders. Governance needs to be clearly
set out in the organisation’s governance documentation, drawing clear lines between mandates, tasks and decision-making between different governance bodies and offices.

Overall, the desk review showed that there is clarity in relation to all the governance bodies examined, although at times, many resolutions needed to be examined to pull together a full picture of the mandate of one body. The stakeholders interviewed considered that the governance documentation is clear on mandates, tasks, and functions for the COP and SC (which is also evidenced by the desk review), but clarity is reduced in relation to some of the subgroups. For the COP and SC, the mandates are felt to be wide enough in that they can take on a wide range of technical issues relating to emerging wetlands management challenges, thus allowing the Convention to be flexible and agile, and able to adapt to emerging issues within the scope of the Convention’s work.

However, even if the wide and unspecific wording allows for flexible and agile working, often the result of consensus driven decision making, the responses show that this wide language causes some lack of clarity in relation to implementation of tasks designated to the subsidiary governance bodies or CPs. This causes, at times, procedural issues to take prominence in agendas and deliberations in the place of substantive and technical discussions on wetland management. The findings from the interviews and survey also point to a lack of clarity due to limited information flows between the COPs, even though the desk review shows that meeting documentation is made available on the website and responsibilities for disseminating information from meetings is clearly set out in resolutions. There is therefore a mismatch between the express and clear governance tasks and functions and how these are understood and perceived by the stakeholders.

3.2 Legitimacy

LEGITIMACY - All parties to the Convention are fairly represented, whether directly or by a legitimate representative, and are informed and empowered to validate or question all decisions taken by the Convention.

Legitimacy is often referred to as participation and assesses whether all stakeholders of an organisation are able to have their voices heard, so that the organisation is seen to legitimately act for its stakeholders.

The governance of the Convention is viewed as legitimate throughout its governance bodies. All Contracting Parties are given representation either individually or representationally, and are given a vote, and thereby a voice. In accordance with the nature of multilateral agreements, each member country decides itself who is to be their representative for the Convention. The COP agrees on the composition of the countries that form the SC which represents it in the direction and management of the Convention’s work between the COPs. Subgroups are created by the COP or the SC and all CPs are free to engage in any subgroup or attend the SC as an observer (if not an appointed member).

The stakeholders interviewed all felt legitimacy of the Convention is strong. The concerns raised regarding legitimacy related to the varying levels of capacity and political will between the different CPs. This is a common concern and dilemma for any multilateral organisation that is dependent on the political will and engagement of its member states, but as a Convention and organisation, to stay independent of this political power and allow full participation by all its members.5

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Currently, the interviews and survey showed there is a perception that certain countries are able to more actively engage in the Convention’s governance with larger delegations, favourable logistics and language capacity. A CP’s actual ability to be represented and engage is of course completely dependent on its own delegate(s) participation and re-engagement with its own country after and in between COPs, which is applicable to both developed and developing countries. As the desk review and interview and survey responses show that the Convention is legitimate, the concern raised is a reflection of behaviours of engagement with the Convention, rather than a flaw in the governance structure.

3.3 Accountability

ACCOUNTABILITY - The decision-making bodies of the Convention are accessible to their stakeholders, who are informed and empowered to question decisions taken. All governance bodies are seen as responsible and accountable for the decisions they take.

Accountability is recognised as a fundamental factor for effective governance within all types of organisations, be it private or public. Legitimacy is often dependent on the two assessment criteria above with the addition of “answerability,” which is the factor assessed herein. While assessing the criteria of accountability, we have focused on the process of decision-making and the flow of information to stakeholders in relation to the decisions that are to be taken.

There are Rules of Procedure for the COP, as well as certain Resolutions, that set out the process for decision-making for the governance bodies, describing how issues are to be put forward, debated, negotiated and finally decided. Consensus is the preferred method of decision-making even if specific voting can be used according to the Rules of Procedure or Resolutions. The Rules of Procedure for the COP are used mutatis mutandis for the SC as well. There is therefore, on the face of documentation, the foundation for accountability.

The desk review showed that the Ramsar Convention has a high rate of submission of national reports to the COP, and with mechanisms in place in the Rules of Procedure to discuss and question any agenda item during meetings, accountability is possible. However, the main findings from the interviews and survey show that, again, comments on lack of accountability are based on perceived low internal flows of information on follow-up of implementation of resolutions and decisions which are taken at the COP and SC.

The practical consequences of this contrast between desk review and interview and survey findings is a possible “acceptance” of weak accountability resulting in responses criticising accountability but very few proposals for how this can be solved.

3.4 Effectiveness

EFFECTIVENESS - The governance bodies deliver, in a timely and effective manner, on the objectives set out by their mandates in the Convention.

This assessment criterion is, in essence, a reflection of the aforementioned assessment criteria taken as a whole.

The majority of CPs interviewed and surveyed feel that the governance of the Ramsar Convention supports the progress of work towards the Vision and Mission of the Convention. They also feel it could be better, which is expected as all respondents wish to highlight the areas of improvement that they feel are important. This is especially relevant in MEAs where Contracting Parties are sovereign countries which are free to engage with the Convention at their own discretion.
As the number of participants at the meetings is generally large, there is felt, in theory, to be a strong mix of skills and experiences at the COP and within the SC in order for there to be proper and efficient management of the governance.

The factors which are felt to reduce effectiveness are mainly the process related to putting forward resolutions, and the fact that the rules that govern this process are not the most effective manner of working. The different responses show that there are too many resolutions, too many steps within the preparation process, insufficient review of resolutions before they are finalised for the COP and insufficient support to CPs from the Secretariat to prepare resolutions.

Another factor influencing effectiveness is that the stakeholders interviewed perceive there to be a lack of communication between COPs. The desk review shows that all documentation relating to the Convention COP and SC meetings are available on the website and responsibility for reconnecting with CPs is expressed in Resolution XIII.4. However, there is still a perception that limited follow-up information is shared after these meetings and that communication is only picked up again when preparation for the next COP needs to start. This in turn, results in a gap in knowledge of the stakeholders and governance capacity in conjunction with the next COP meetings.

3.5 Costs

**COST - The cost of governance is justifiable relative to its delivery of impact.**

The Convention is funded by each Contracting Party contributing a minimum funding contribution which is agreed at the COP. The majority of the CPs do pay their minimum contribution⁶, and some CPs also contribute in addition to this for specific activities and programs. The cost of the governance is very lean as the main costs for the COP and the developed country CPs’ own participation is borne by countries themselves, with developing country CPs receiving financial support to attend meetings.

The desk review shows that budget accountability, managed by the Secretariat and overseen by the Subgroup on Finance, is seen to have been improved. Also, it is evident in reports from the SC and the Subgroup on Finance that attempts are being made to explore how financing can be improved to increase the number of the minimum contributions being paid. However, no solutions have been found yet.

4. Findings – Individual Governance Structures and Procedures

Below we have provided the main findings for each assessment criteria for each governance body.

**The speedometer**

shows the overall summary of the different assessment criteria for the governance of any given body, where **green is working well, amber is some concerns, but meeting requirements (as set out in governance documents) and red is major concerns.**

As aforementioned in the methodology section of this report, this review and summary of findings sought to identify and nuance the assessment of a governance body by utilising mixed methods. While SRI Executive sees the value in triangulation and demonstrating key findings holistically, we recognize that Contracting Parties may wish to understand the extent to which these findings have been reflected across each method or medium of data collection. It is recognised that governance documentation is insufficient as the only source for a governance review as governance is

⁶ Resolution XIII.2 (3).
implemented by behaviours and the perceptions of these behaviours. As such we have indicated below in the text and tables within each assessment criteria the main source of the conclusion drawn by our independent team, and the percentage of times this conclusion was raised within the sample. Rather than following scientific thresholds, it is common practice in a review such as this one or a stakeholder analysis to bring out and analyse the interesting findings that when combined across multiple mediums would see a threshold closer to 20-30% but show a regular reference to an issue that is noteworthy and should be taken on-board by the Effectiveness Working Group for further consideration.

4.1 The Conference of Contracting Parties
The mandate and task of the COP are very clearly set out in the Convention text, Article 6. Its mandate is:

a) to discuss the implementation of this Convention;

b) to discuss additions to and changes in the List (of Ramsar Sites);

c) to consider information regarding changes in the ecological character of wetlands included in the List provided in accordance with paragraph 2 of Article 3;

d) to make general or specific recommendations to the Contracting Parties regarding the conservation, management and wise use of wetlands and their flora and fauna;

e) to request relevant international bodies to prepare reports and statistics on matters which are essentially international in character affecting wetlands;

f) to adopt other recommendations, or resolutions, to promote the functioning of this Convention.

All Contracting Parties have a vote at the COP meeting, although the reports from the COP meetings and the interviews and survey responses confirm that resolutions are passed by consensus, with objections noted. IOPs and other observers who attend can request to speak, which provides legitimacy and accountability to the meeting. In our desk review of the last two COP meetings (2018 and 2015) 25 resolutions relating to the above mandate areas were passed at COP 13 and 16 at COP 12. Out of these total 41 resolutions, 15 related to procedural or internal management issues of the Convention and the other 26 related to substantive issues in relation to wetlands management.

Resolutions are made available to all CPs on the Ramsar website in all official convention languages. The desk review shows that the mandate and tasks of the COP do not overlap with the other decision-making bodies of the Convention, particularly the Standing Committee (SC). Specifically, Resolution 3.3 which established the SC states in paragraph 1(a) that it shall “carry out, between one ordinary meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties and the next, such interim activity on behalf of the Conference as may be necessary, such activity being limited to matters on which the Conference has previously recorded its approval”.

The desk review also shows that one of the significant success factors of the COP is the high submission of national progress reports from CPs. In document 11.1 from the last COP 13 meeting, 140 national reports had been received prior to the meeting. This is one of the highest rates of reporting of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).
The responses in the interviews and survey show that the COP has a clear mandate and function (see figure 1 below). The COP is understood to issue resolutions which are clear 7.

100% of the responses in the interviews state that the mandate and function of the COP is clear and that it has full legitimacy, however 62% of the responses qualify that statement with issues which they feel would improve the clarity, legitimacy and function of the COP. 70% of the responses in the online survey state that CPs are all well informed in order to take decisions at the COP, but again, 45% of those responses qualify their “yes” with the fact that there is varying capacity of the delegates (language and knowledge of Ramsar), and a lack of follow-up information between the COPs.

**Figure 1 – Online Survey result for COP**

5. To what extent do you agree the governance bodies have clear delegated mandates allocated to them? (6 – Strongly Agree; 2 – Strongly Disagree; 1 – not aware)

The Rules of Procedure are adopted at the beginning of each COP, as set out in Article 6(4) of the Convention and thereby prescribe the process for the submission and review of resolutions for the next COP. They also provide the rules of procedure for all other governance meetings carried out during the triennium as they are used mutatis mutandis for other governance bodies’ meetings. The Rules of Procedure can only be amended by the COP meeting itself. The current Rules of Procedure are in the process of being reviewed, as per resolution XIII.4 from COP 13.

The Rules of Procedure set out the requirements for providing notice of meetings, the submission of resolutions, how the meeting is to be held, the roles of the Chair and other governance roles, and how meeting documentation is published and shared. The Rules of Procedure are detailed on all these aspects.

A vital part of any Convention is the process for creating, adopting and then implementing resolutions, as they are one of the main mechanisms for interpreting and taking action under the convention. The figure below shows the overall process for submitting resolutions to the COP.

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7 90% of 1:1 interview and 68% online survey responses agree that the resolutions are clear and enacted in a manner that follows agreed upon rules.
Informal regional meetings may take place to discuss the draft resolutions before the SC Pre-COP Meeting, and immediately prior to the COP regional meetings are scheduled which provides the forum for convergence on issues relating to draft resolutions, although there is no decision-making power or rules on how these meetings are to be conducted.

From the desk review it is noted that the timelines and steps of action set out in the Rules of Procedure for the COP meetings are adhered to well by the CPs and the Secretariat which provides the administrative support for the COP meetings. However, the interview and survey responses show that the processes set out in the Rules of Procedure are not seen as the most effective in relation to preparing resolutions. The comments relate mainly to the quality of the resolutions due to inadequate scrutiny before they come to the COP for approval.

The table below sets a summation of the conclusions we have been able to draw by looking at the documentation (desk review), the results of the face to face interviews and a review of the survey results and comments received in the online survey, in relation to each governance assessment criteria for each of the governance bodies. We have indicated in each criteria the main source of the conclusion and the percentage of responses. In relation to the interview and survey results, we have here below looked at the responses and comments which were given that directly relate to the governance role of the COP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governance assessment criteria</th>
<th>Conclusions from review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Page 13 of 34
### CLARITY

**Mandate, tasks and responsibilities for decisions and actions in the Convention are clearly delineated, allocated and accepted.**

- Mandate and tasks clearly set out in Convention and resolutions (desk review)
- Mandate and tasks clearly delineated from other governing bodies (desk review)
- Tasks and responsibilities assigned through resolutions generally understood to be clear and accepted by all Contracting Parties (100% 1:1, 62% with qualifying statements, 72% survey)
- Inconsistencies and contradictions in resolutions due to poor preparation creates lack of clarity in relation to how resolutions should be implemented (desk review and 53% 1:1, 31% survey)

### LEGITIMACY

**All parties to the Convention are fairly represented and are informed and empowered to validate or question all decisions taken by the Convention.**

- Each Contracting Party given representation and a vote/voice at the COP (desk review)
- All Contracting Parties are informed with all relevant information prior to and during COPs and thereby given opportunity to carry out their responsibilities (desk review)
- Strong engagement at regional level during the regional pre-COP meetings (31% 1:1 interviews)
- Unequal levels of engagement and ability to fully engage in plenary deliberations as well as “corridor discussions” between Contracting Parties and contact groups resulting in actual imbalance of representation by the CPs at COP (62% 1:1, 28% survey)

### ACCOUNTABILITY

**The decision-making bodies of the Convention are accessible to their stakeholders, who are informed and empowered to question decisions taken. All governance bodies are responsible and accountable for the decisions they take.**

- All decisions of COP and related documents relating to the COP are accessible online at the deadlines specified in the Rules of Procedure (desk review)
- Rules of Procedure allow for draft Resolutions to be questioned, debated and negotiated (desk review)
- Concern regarding follow-up of delegated work in resolutions and no mechanism of enforcement (desk review and 67% 1:1, 50% survey)
- Lack of communication between COPs to CPs results in difficulties to voice question on progress presented at next COP (38% 1:1, 34% survey)
EFFECTIVENESS
The governance bodies deliver, in a timely and effective manner, on the objectives set out by their mandates.

- Dependent on good chairing and informed participation of delegates (46% 1:1, 28% survey)
- Dependent on the participation and truthful self-assessment of implementation by Contracting Parties (desk review)
- Inequality of knowledge and capacity of delegates creates inefficiencies in both creation process and quality of resolutions submitted and participation in debates (62% 1:1, 28% survey)
- Lack of implementation enforcement mechanism and follow-up means difficult to assess effectiveness (desk review and 67% 1:1, 50% survey)

COST
The cost of governance is justifiable relative to its impact on delivering results for the Convention.

- Cost of COP meetings are carried by the host country and developed country CPs pay for their own participation. Developing country CPs receive financial support to attend (desk review)
- Financial stability is discussed (Finance Subgroup) and assessed regularly (desk review)

From the text and table above, we have drawn out the main findings.

Initial Findings and Next Steps

Process to prepare and submit resolutions to the COP: The process for preparing Resolutions for the COP is set out in the Rules of Procedure and although clear, the responses from the 1:1 interviews and online survey show that there is a need for the procedure to be amended so that the scrutiny of resolutions leads to them being clearer. All preparatory documentation is made available on the Ramsar website, but a common platform does not exist for all CPs to work on the documents. The process involves a number of steps as described above in order for Resolutions to be submitted to the COP.

Related to the process of preparing resolutions, there have been a number of “repeat issues” in resolutions which have already been decided on in previous COPs but have not been caught in the review prior to being submitted to a COP. Work has begun since the last COP (Resolution 13.4) to review all resolutions in order to find duplications and therefore be able to propose to the COP that resolutions are closed for future deliberation. However, CPs still perceive the support provided during the preparation process of resolutions as weak (see section 4.8 Secretariat), and therefore the risk of repetitive or poorly prepared resolutions is still very high.

Varying capacity and knowledge of delegates: The Convention is legitimate and fully represented by its stakeholders, the Contracting Parties, which are all given a voice through a vote at the meeting. However, as noted above, resolutions are approved by consensus with objections noted.
The varying capacity and knowledge of the delegates, as well as language issues, means that it is not possible to conclude whether delegates, in reality, participate actively by exercising a vote, although meetings reports do, to some extent, note the CP that has commented or raised an objection. This may prevent all CPs from being able to participate fully (which is noted in responses in 1:1 interviews and online survey). Certain countries are able to send large delegations and can therefore participate in a greater part of the work of the COP, including in parallel contact groups or other informal groups undertaking work at the COP. There is also a large discrepancy between the institutional knowledge as the same delegate does not always attend several COPs.

As we move to suggestions for improvements, SRI Executive will look at the composition, mandates and procedures for other MEAs which could provide ideas for improving the procedural efficiency of preparing resolutions. SRI Executive will also look at suggestions for strengthening the capacity of the delegates to enhance their engagement in the COP.

4.2 Standing Committee

The Standing Committee (SC) was first established in 1987 in order to give the Ramsar Convention a body through which interim activities between the COPs could be carried out. The SC acts within the scope of what the COP meeting resolutions have approved and is given its tasks through a resolution at each COP\(^8\). The Rules of Procedure for the Standing Committee are the Rules of Procedure for the COP and apply *mutatis mutandis*.

The Standing Committee is currently composed of 20 members (17 Regional members (voting), the host for the next COP meeting (voting) and 1 permanent observer for the host country of the Secretariat (not voting). Observers (this includes CPs which are not SC members, representatives of organisations that Ramsar has a co-operation with, and the Chair of the STRP) which wish to attend the Standing Committee meetings put forward a request to attend three months prior to the meeting. 75% of the online survey responses agree that the Standing Committee is legitimate and representative of the Convention members.

The desk review of the last eight SC meetings (SC 51-57) show that the notice of the meeting and publication of documents before and after the meeting were carried out according to the deadlines set out in the Rules on Procedure. The desk review also showed that the meetings adhered to the agenda and that all decisions are recorded in the reports of the meetings, which are available on the Ramsar website.

For a number of years, the Convention has had a practice of holding regional meetings, although there is no decision-making power or rules on how these meetings are to be conducted (the Secretariat does provide some support). For example, regional meetings held before the pre-COP SC meeting are used differently by various regions to exchange views and potentially reach convergence on issues relating to draft resolutions, but are also used to exchange technical knowledge and lessons-learnt.

The interview and online survey responses show that the Standing Committee has a clear mandate that is understood by the CPs and IOPs (over 50% in both interviews and survey), but the clarity is not as strong as with the COP (see Figure 2 below). The interview responses and survey comments

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\(^8\) The latest Standing Committee composition and tasks for the triennium is set out in Resolution XIII.4.
indicate that the slightly lower result for clarity is based on views that the Standing Committee should have its own Rules of Procedure (31% responses in 1:1s and 28% online survey), that a new orientation is needed for the new members at each triennium, which affects continuity, that decisions are not always clear, and that the meeting reports are not detailed enough to be informative for those who have not attended.

**Figure 2 – Online Survey result for the Standing Committee**

5. **To what extent do you agree the governance bodies have clear delegated mandates allocated to them?** (6 – Strongly Agree; 2 – Strongly Disagree; 1- Not aware)

These comments should be seen against the background of the fact that the COP issues a Resolution at each of its meetings setting out the responsibilities, roles and composition of the Standing Committee and regional categorization of countries under the Convention. This resolution also places responsibility on the regionally appointed SC members to “maintain regular contacts and consultations with the Contracting Parties in their regional group”, and requests the Secretariat to provide induction training for the new SC members to support introduction of new members. It would therefore seem that the interview and survey responses indicate a lack of awareness.

The Standing Committee is also felt to be accountable (68 % survey) and that it has in the last couple of years become more effective in that more agenda time has been given to discussing substantive wetland management issues, rather than only procedural issues.

The table below sets a summation of the conclusions we have been able to draw by looking at the documentation (desk review), the results of the 1:1 interviews and a review of the survey results and comments received in the survey, in relation to each governance assessment criteria for the Standing Committee.

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9 [XIII.4 Annex 3 paragraph 2.](#)  
10 New Standing Committee members are also encouraged to attend the Bureau meeting during the COP to gain insight into the current work of Standing Committee members and the overall work of the COP meeting.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governance assessment criteria</th>
<th>Conclusions from review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLARITY</strong>&lt;br&gt;Mandate, tasks and responsibilities for decisions and actions in the Convention are clearly delineated, allocated and accepted.</td>
<td>• Mandate and tasks clearly set out in Convention and resolutions (desk review)&lt;br&gt;• Mandate and tasks clearly delineated from COP (desk review)&lt;br&gt;• Tasks and responsibilities assigned through resolutions to the SC generally understood to be clear and accepted (desk review and 68% survey)&lt;br&gt;• Level of understanding of mandate and tasks varies between Contracting Parties (62% 1:1s, 28% survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LEGITIMACY</strong>&lt;br&gt;All parties to the Convention are fairly represented and are informed and empowered to validate or question all decisions taken by the Convention.</td>
<td>• Regions are proportionally represented in Standing Committee and SC members are nominated by the regions, in a rotational manner or through voting (desk review)&lt;br&gt;• All Contracting Parties are informed with all relevant information prior to and during SC meetings and thereby given opportunity to carry out their responsibilities (desk review)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACCOUNTABILITY</strong>&lt;br&gt;The decision-making bodies of the Convention are accessible to their stakeholders, who are informed and empowered to question decisions taken. All governance bodies are responsible and accountable for the decisions they take.</td>
<td>• SC reports on its activities at each convention (desk review)&lt;br&gt;• Material for SC meetings made available to all members on the Ramsar website (desk review)&lt;br&gt;• CPs see the SC as being accountable for its work (68% online survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effectiveness</strong>&lt;br&gt;The governance bodies deliver, in a timely and effective manner, on the objectives set out by their mandates.</td>
<td>• General positive attitude that Ramsar Convention’s SC delivers “with respect to its current capacity” (100% 1:1, with 62% clarifying comments, 68% survey)&lt;br&gt;• Dependent on good chairing and informed participation of members (46% 1:1s, 28% survey)&lt;br&gt;• Lack of own rules of procedure and implementation enforcement mechanism means difficult for SC to respond to lack of responsiveness by Contracting Parties to its work (54% 1:1s, 33% survey)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Initial Findings and Next Steps

The Standing Committee is overall functioning well with a clear and understood mandate, tasks outlined in COP resolutions from each COP meeting, and the Standing Committee’s work is seen to be carried out in a legitimate and accountable manner by the CPs. It should be noted that Resolution XIII.4 is dedicated to the function of the Standing Committee from COP 13, available on the Ramsar website, which clarifies and explains the responsibilities of the SC members clearly.

In contrast, there are sufficient qualitative responses that show the following:

1. **Follow-up from previous meetings**, specifically in relation to reporting of subgroups, is seen to be weak and therefore the ability of all the Standing Committee members to be prepared for the meeting is felt to be varied.

2. **Separate Rules of Procedure for the Standing Committee**: The Rules of Procedure for the COP sets out in Rule 25 that the Rules of Procedure for the COP shall apply *mutatis mutandis* to the SC (and all other subgroups). This means that the Rules of Procedure have to be re-interpreted for the SC meetings. This causes, at times, discussions on process taking up time which could otherwise be dedicated to discussing and developing the technical aspects of the wetland management.

As we move to suggestions for improvements, SRI Executive will look at the composition, mandates and procedures for other MEAs which could be used to see where the Standing Committee can improve on its procedural efficiency (possible own Rules of Procedure), disseminating information and building capacity of its members.

### 4.3 Management Working Group

Resolution IX.24 (2005), on *Improving management of the Ramsar Convention*, the Conference of the Parties established a Management Working Group (MWG) which reports to the Standing Committee and the COP.\(^\text{11}\) Its mandate was at the time set to examine and review the various

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\(^\text{11}\) COP9 determined that the Management Working Group would comprise:

a) the Chair and Vice Chair of the Standing Committee of the previous triennium;

b) the Chair and Vice Chair of the Standing Committee established for the forthcoming triennium;
management structures and systems in place within the Convention and to report back to the COP with their recommendations on:

a. improving the existing terms of reference and/or operating procedures of the Standing Committee, the Subgroup on Finance, the Scientific and Technical Review Panel, Regional Meetings, and the Secretariat;

b. establishing any new management structures that the Working Group concludes may be needed;

c. strengthening linkages between the Contracting Parties and the International Organization Partners.

The desk review shows that in 2008, the MWG was reaffirmed by the COP meeting with the only amendment that it not be limited in time, but rather that reports be provided regularly to the SC on progress made and that report findings be provided to each COP. Subsequently, the MWG has also been given the mandate to oversee the work of the STRP replacing the full mandate of the STRP Oversight Committee as set out in Resolution IX.1112.

The responses received during the interviews and in the online survey show a low level of clarity of the MWG’s mandate, function or tasks. The issue is based on the fact that there is no one document clearly setting out the MWG’s full mandate and purpose (55% 1:1 interviews, 37% survey). In contrast, the online survey shows that the MWG is seen to be accessible (79%) and accountable (72%).

**Figure 3—Online Survey result for the Management Working Group**

*To what extent do you agree the governance bodies have clear delegated mandates allocated to them? (6 – Strongly Agree; 2 – Strongly Disagree; 1 - Not aware)*

*Management Working Group*

c) the Chairs of the Subgroup on Finance of the previous and forthcoming Standing Committees;
d) the Chairs of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel in the previous and forthcoming triennia;
e) any other interested Contracting Parties, keeping in mind the desirability of equitable regional participation;
f) a representative of the International Organization Partners (IOPs);
g) the Secretary General ex officio; and
h) an appropriate expert on organizational review, as needed, to be determined by the Working Group, subject to there being no implications for the Convention’s budget;

12 i) to appoint the members of the STRP and appoint the Chair and Vice-Chair from among them; ii) to oversee the implementation of the STRP’s programme, and report progress to each Standing Committee with recommendations for action as required; iii) to guide and support the Panel as required; iv) to recommend the allocation of funds for STRP tasks to the Standing Committee Sub-group on Finance; and v) to work with the Secretariat to oversee STRP expenditures.
4.4 Executive Team

The Executive Team consists of the SC Chair, SC Vice Chair, and Chair of the Subgroup on Finance and provides oversight of the Secretariat’s work between the SC meetings. It defines its own Terms of Reference for each triennium, to be approved by the SC, the current terms of reference having been approved at SC57. It is mainly seen as a resource for the Secretary General to have quicker and more efficient access to the SC between the SC meetings in order to implement the decisions of the SC.

The Executive Team’s tasks are to:

a. provide guidance and advice to the Secretariat on the execution of the Secretariat’s budget and the conduct of the Secretariat’s work programmes;

b. provide guidance and advice to the Secretariat on the preparation of meetings, and on any other matters relating to the exercise of its functions brought to it by the Secretariat.

4.5 Subgroup on Finance

The Subgroup on Finance was established through Resolution VI.17 in 1996. It was given the mandate to deal with all financial matters of the Convention and report and make recommendations on these matters to the Standing Committee. Resolution XIII.2 altered the composition to consist of a CP member from each Ramsar Region, with one CP within this group appointed as Chair, plus the former Chair of the Finance Subgroup.

The desk review shows that the Subgroup on Finance has presented reports to all SC (SC 51-57) meetings that were reviewed¹³.

Figure 4– Online Survey result for the Subgroup on Finance

To what extent do you agree the governance bodies have clear delegated mandates allocated to them? (6 – Strongly Agree; 2 – Strongly Disagree; 1- Not aware)

Subgroup on Finance

¹³ Except the post-COP SC56 that did not have financial issues on the agenda
Summary for the conclusions about the convention bodies handled in chapter 4.3-4.5

The table below sets a summation of the conclusions we have been able to draw by looking at the documentation (desk review), the results of the 1:1 interviews and a review of the survey results and comments received in the survey, in relation to each governance assessment criteria for the Management Working Group, Executive Team and Subgroup on Finance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governance assessment criteria</th>
<th>Conclusions from review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLARITY</strong>&lt;br&gt;Mandate, tasks and responsibilities for decisions and actions in the Convention are clearly delineated, allocated and accepted.</td>
<td>• Mandate and tasks for all subgroups clearly set out in Resolution but in very broad terms and no one place where all tasks are listed (desk review)&lt;br&gt;• For Secretariat, the distinction between the ET and the MWG is clear and an efficient mechanism to progress work (1:1 interviews)&lt;br&gt;• For CPs, very limited clarity of mandate and tasks of MWG (55% 1:1, 37% survey)&lt;br&gt;• Subgroup on Finance is clear in its mandate and function (desk review)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LEGITIMACY</strong>&lt;br&gt;All parties to the Convention are fairly represented and are informed and empowered to validate or question all decisions taken by the Convention.</td>
<td>• The members of the MWG, ET and Subgroup on Finance are clear and set out by COP resolutions (desk review)&lt;br&gt;• Regional and IOP representatives are included in MWG (desk review)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACCOUNTABILITY
The decision-making bodies of the Convention are accessible to their stakeholders, who are informed and empowered to question decisions taken. All governance bodies are responsible and accountable for the decisions they take.

- MWG, ET and Subgroup on Finance acts within their mandates and report on their activities to each meeting of SC and can be questioned (80% survey)

EFFECTIVENESS
The governance bodies deliver, in a timely and effective manner, on the objectives set out by their mandates.

- Ambiguity as to MWGs mandate to suggest action to SC or provide guidance to the Secretariat causes confusion as to implementation of decisions and resolutions (55% 1:1 interviews).

COST
The cost of governance is justifiable relative to its impact on delivering results for the Convention.

- The meetings of these bodies are mainly carried out at the same time as SC meetings or during the COP (desk review).

From the text and table above, we have drawn out the main findings.

Initial Findings and Next Steps

The desk review shows that there is documentation that sets out the scope of the mandate for the MWG, Subgroup on Finance and the Executive Team. In contrast, the interview responses indicate that CPs would like a clearer description of the mandate of these groups so that it is in one place rather than pieced together in different resolutions, and therefore help CPs understand the work and support these subgroups provide.

As we move to suggestions for improvements, SRI Executive will review options for procedures so to ensure that mandates of all subgroups (permanent or temporary) are clearly stated for ease of reference and understanding for CPs.

4.6 Scientific and Technical Review Panel
The STRP was established by Resolution V.5 in 1993 with a mandate to provide scientific and technical guidance to the COP, SC and Secretariat. The STRP’s workplan, based on priorities set at COP meetings, is approved by the SC. The STRP is made up of 18 scientific and technical expert members, nominated by the Contracting Parties and other COP observer organisations, and who have appropriate scientific and technical knowledge. They are then appointed by the MWG which has oversight of the work of the STRP. The STRP meetings can also have observers representing the International Organisation Partners (IOPs), scientific and technical expert(s) recommended by Contracting Parties and other organizations recognized by the COP.
The desk review looked at STRP meetings since 2015 and based on the publications of agenda and other documentation on the Ramsar website, it is clear that the timelines set in the Rules of Procedure for meetings is not adhered to and that documentation is made available on a more ad hoc basis. In 2016 there was no STRP meeting and since 2017 there is no report published on the website under the headings STRP, as these are a part of the MWG reports to the SC meetings (and ultimately to the COP). The reports are therefore found in a different place on the website.

The STRP is understood by most CPs to have a clear mandate.

**Figure 5— Online Survey result for the STRP**

*To what extent do you agree the governance bodies have clear delegated mandates allocated to them? (6 – Strongly Agree; 2 – Strongly Disagree; 1- Not aware)*

Resolution XII.5 sets out the process by which the COP will approve the STRP priority thematic work areas for each triennium. The responses in the 1:1 interviews and online survey were positive towards the support provided by the STRP to the COP and SC, noting that the STRP Chair is active at these meetings. The responses also indicated that a change of procedure in Resolution XII.5 means that the STRP now is more reactive to the urgent issues of the CPs. However, the desk review and the responses show that it takes more than 6 months (COP 13 in June 2018, STRP workplan approved at SC57 in June 2019) to approve the STRP workplan which reduces the amount of time it is able to work on its tasks significantly.

4.7 Communication, Education, Participation, and Awareness (CEPA) Oversight Panel
At the 7th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP7), Resolution VII.9 adopted the first programme of actions for promoting communication, education, participation, and awareness (CEPA) under the Convention. The Contracting Parties have named government and non-governmental National CEPA Focal Points who are expected to form part of a global network of experts. Each CP is free to set the precise roles and responsibilities of their CEPA Focal Points according to the suggested areas set out in Resolution XII.9.
The CEPA Oversight Panel was established at COP9 Resolution IX.18, to monitor and inform on CEPA issues within the Convention and the implementation of the CEPA programme set out above, advising the Standing Committee and Secretariat on priorities at national and international level including CEPA priorities of STRP.

In April 2019 the Secretariat proposed a revised structure and working mechanism for the CEPA Oversight Panel, which was approved by the Standing Committee inter-sessionally\(^\text{14}\). The desk review shows that there are concerns that the mandate and appointment process for the CEPA Oversight Panel is not clear, however, as can been seen below, the online survey shows that respondents feel there is clarity.

**Figure 6– Online Survey result for the CEPA Oversight Panel**

*To what extent do you agree the governance bodies have clear delegated mandates allocated to them? (6 – Strongly Agree; 2 – Strongly Disagree; 1- Not aware)*

**CEPA Oversight Panel**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mandate, tasks and responsibilities for decisions</th>
<th>Conclusion from review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mandate and tasks clearly set out in resolutions and understood by most CPs (desk review and 51% survey).</td>
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</table>

\(^{14}\) The composition is the Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee, acting as Chair of the Oversight Panel, a maximum of six representatives of Contracting Parties, which may include CEPA Government Focal Points, Standing Committee representatives or other representatives of Parties (a maximum of one per region), the Vice-Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel, a maximum of two NGO Focal Points (not from the same region), a maximum of two representatives of the IOPS; and a representative of the Convention Secretariat (ex officio).
and actions in the Convention are clearly delineated, allocated and accepted.

- Mandate and tasks clearly delineated from other governing bodies with clear reporting lines (desk review)
- Procedure for appointment of STRP and CEPA Oversight Panel to be reviewed by Secretariat as resolutions on process are unclear (desk review)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEGITIMACY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All parties to the Convention</td>
<td>The members of the STRP are appointed by the MWG (desk review)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are fairly represented and</td>
<td>Members of CEPA Oversight Panel appointed at SC 57 (desk review)</td>
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<tr>
<td>are informed and empowered to</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>validate or question all</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>decisions taken by the</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Convention.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACCOUNTABILITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The decision-making bodies</td>
<td>The key thematic areas are indicated by the COP meeting and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the Convention are</td>
<td>then further elaborated in a STRP workplan, approved by the</td>
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<tr>
<td>accessible to their</td>
<td>SC. (desk review)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stakeholders, who are</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>informed and empowered to</td>
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<tr>
<td>question decisions taken.</td>
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<tr>
<td>All governance bodies are</td>
<td>There is a gap between what is asked/expected by COP Resolutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seen as responsible and</td>
<td>and actual capacity of STRP (46% 1:1, 12% online survey)</td>
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<tr>
<td>accountable for the decisions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>they take.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EFFECTIVENESS</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The governance bodies</td>
<td>Chair of the STRP resigned in November 2019. A new Chair was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deliver, in a timely and</td>
<td>appointed by the MWG in March 2020. (desk review)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effective manner, on the</td>
<td>The process to appoint members and approve workplan and then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>objectives set out by their</td>
<td>implement it is too long (desk review and 24% survey responses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mandates.</td>
<td>The mandate of the CEPA oversight panel is not very clear</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and it is currently under review (desk review &amp; 1:1 interviews)</td>
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<tr>
<th>COST</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The cost of governance is</td>
<td>Budget is accounted for in COP budget for each triennium and</td>
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<tr>
<td>justifiable relative to its</td>
<td>approved by SC.</td>
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<tr>
<td>impact on delivering results</td>
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<td>for the Convention.</td>
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From the text and table above, we have drawn out the main findings.

Initial Findings and Next Steps
The desk review shows that there is documentation that sets out the scope of the mandate and task of the STRP and CEPA Oversight Panel and it is clearly understood by the CPs, although the desk review and 1:1 interviews show that more clarity as to appointment process for members of the CEPA Oversight Panel is needed. The responses in the interviews and online survey, as well as desk review of COP and SC reports, show there is a lack of clarity on the process to choose members for the CEPA Oversight Panel and that the commencement of work for the STRP is delayed as their thematic priority areas of work is first set at the COP meeting, and then developed into a workplan, approved by the next SC meeting.

As we move to suggestions for improvements, SRI Executive will review options for procedures to ensure that appointment of members and workplans can be approved in a more expedient manner. The MEA comparison will also give examples of how other Conventions interact with their scientific and technical committees.

4.8 Secretariat

The Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention was originally referred to as the Bureau in the Convention text (Article 8) and its functions\(^{15}\) were undertaken by the International Union on Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The Secretariat manages the day to day operations of the Ramsar Convention. It is led by the Secretary General who is appointed by the Standing Committee (current Secretary General was appointed by SC52-05 decision). The staff of the Secretariat support the CPs to implement the Strategic Plan of the Convention. The current activities of the Secretariat are outlined in its Workplan 2019 – 2021 which was approved by the SC 57-21 decision. These activities are informed by its overall mandate set out in Article 8 as well as resolutions from the COP meetings and SC decisions.

In relation to this review, the main governance mandate and tasks of the Secretariat are (as outlined on the Ramsar Convention website):\(^{16}\)

- a) help convene and organize the Conferences of Contracting Parties (COP) and regional pre-COP meetings, the meetings of the Standing Committee and of the STRP;
- b) publish the Decisions, Resolutions, and Recommendations of the COP and the Standing Committee;
- c) inform the Contracting Parties and the public of developments related to the Convention.

\(^{15}\) a) to assist in the convening and organizing of Conferences specified in Article 6; b) to maintain the List of Wetlands of International Importance and to be informed by the Contracting Parties of any additions, extensions, deletions or restrictions concerning wetlands included in the List provided in accordance with paragraph 5 of Article 2; c) to be informed by the Contracting Parties of any changes in the ecological character of wetlands included in the List provided in accordance with paragraph 2 of Article 3; d) to forward notification of any alterations to the List, or changes in character of wetlands included therein, to all Contracting Parties and to arrange for these matters to be discussed at the next Conference; e) to make known to the Contracting Party concerned, the recommendations of the Conferences in respect of such alterations to the List or of changes in the character of wetlands included therein.

\(^{16}\) [https://www.ramsar.org/about/the-secretariat](https://www.ramsar.org/about/the-secretariat)
Oversight of the Secretariat is carried out by the Executive Team (see section 4.4 Executive Team) and the budget is overseen by the Subgroup on Finance, both which report to the SC. The Secretary General provides a report to the SC at its meetings and to the COP (Rule of Procedure 26) as well.

From our desk review of governance documentation during the previous 3-6 years, we have noted that the Secretariat has carried out its function in relation to its governance tasks as listed above. It has convened and supported the organisation of the meetings listed above. It has published the documentation to prepare for the meetings and those which record the resolutions and decisions of the COP and SC meetings in accordance with the various timelines set out in the Rules of Procedure and other decisions of the COP and SC. We did note that the dates of publication of agenda and preparatory documents for the STRP have not been in accordance with the timeline set in the Rules of Procedure (no meeting was held in 2016) and it is evident that this meeting is therefore treated in a more ad hoc manner.

The Ramsar website is regularly populated with information of the work of the Ramsar Convention. From the Reports of the last two COPs, it is clear from the documentation that the Secretariat prepares the relevant documentation in the proper manner (to the extent possible as and when it is provided with it) and carries out its tasks during the COP and SC meetings in accordance with the Rules of Procedure.

Since 2014, The Secretariat has organised 2 COP meetings, 11 SC meetings and 5 STRP meetings, as well as supporting meetings of CEPA Oversight Panel and other subgroups.

From the responses in the interviews and survey, the clarity of mandate and function, legitimacy and accountability of the Secretariat is strong. The majority of responses in relation to the Secretariat’s support for the governance processes either in the interviews or the survey show that the mandate and function of the Secretariat is clear and that, through fulfilling the functions it has supported governance processes and dissemination of information in the correct and proper manner.

**Figure 7– Online Survey result for the Secretariat**

*To what extent do you agree the governance bodies have clear delegated mandates allocated to them? (6 – Strongly Agree; 2 – Strongly Disagree, 1 – Not aware)*

*Secretariat*
The table below sets a summation of the conclusions we have been able to draw by looking at the documentation (desk review), the results of the 1:1 interviews and a review of the survey results and comments received in the survey, in relation to each governance assessment criteria for each of the governance bodies. In relation to the interview and survey results, we have looked at the responses and comments which directly relate to the governance role of the Secretariat.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governance assessment criteria</th>
<th>Conclusions from review</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLARITY</strong>&lt;br&gt; <em>Mandate, tasks and responsibilities for decisions and actions in the Convention are clearly delineated, allocated and accepted.</em></td>
<td>• Mandate tasks and responsibilities outlined in the Ramsar Convention, Resolution, SC decision and the Secretariat’s Workplan approved by the SC are clear (desk review).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LEGITIMACY</strong>&lt;br&gt; <em>All parties to the Convention are fairly represented and are informed and empowered to validate or question all decisions taken by the Convention.</em></td>
<td>• Secretary General is appointed by the SC (desk review).&lt;br&gt; • The rest of the Secretariat staff is appointed by the Secretary General.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accountability</strong>&lt;br&gt; <em>The decision-making bodies of the Convention are accessible to their stakeholders, who are informed and empowered to question decisions taken. All governance bodies are seen as responsible and accountable for the decisions they take.</em></td>
<td>• Secretariat is accountable to the Executive Team, on behalf of the SC and its financial management is overseen by the Subgroup on Finance. (desk review)&lt;br&gt; • The Secretary General provides a report to the SC and the COP of the activities of the Convention according to the SC approved Work Plan. (desk review)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effectiveness</strong>&lt;br&gt; <em>The governance bodies deliver, in a timely and effective manner, on the objectives set out by their mandates.</em></td>
<td>• The Secretariat has greatly improved its performance in relation to its mandate following the 10 years audit carried out in 2017-2018 (SC55. Doc 8.2). (desk review)&lt;br&gt; • Secretariat, together with a number of CPs, proposed amendments to the Rules of Procedure at COP 13, to enhance the support that the Secretariat can give during COP meetings (see section 4.1 The Conference of Contracting Parties).&lt;br&gt; • Secretariat is requested to be more pro-active to support CPs in relation to their governance duties (50% 1:1 and 18% survey)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COST

- Cost of the Secretariat’s governance function is relative to the impact it has on delivering results.
- Secretariat needs more funding to increase support to CPs, specifically between COPs (15% online survey)

From the text and table above, we have drawn out the main findings.

**Initial Findings and Next Steps**

As noted above, the Secretariat’s role in the governance of the Convention is clear and should, therefore, be able to function well. There is understanding that the Secretariat is constrained (limited finances, limited staff & time) in the amount of additional support it can give to CPs in relation to governance meetings and processes, however, a majority of the responses show that the governance would be more effective with more pro-active and substantive support to CPs to help them understand the Convention’s governance and therefore be more effective in their own governance work (e.g. in the preparation of resolutions).

As we move to suggestions for improvements, SRI Executive will look at new tools and methods which can be used by the Secretariat to efficiently support the CPs in their governance work, as well as possible suggestions for amendments of the Rules of Procedure.

5. Next Steps

Following this report, SRI Executive will provide a report where a comparison with similar MEAs’ governance structures will be carried out, and subsequently an analysis of where changes to current governance structures or processes may be considered.

Also, in the interviews and the online survey, respondents were asked for their views on the top 3 governance practices which are felt to be needed overall for the effective governance of the Ramsar Convention to deliver on its Vision and Mission. The responses show that these are chairing of governance meetings\(^{17}\) (28%), communication between meetings (34%), and accountability 67% 1:1s, 50% online survey).

Respondents were also asked whether, in addition to the existing Rules of Procedure and processes set out in Resolutions, there were other processes needed within the operations of the Convention. The responses mostly referred to a need for an efficient process for preparation of resolutions (28%), individual rules of procedure for different governance bodies (33%), training within the

\(^{17}\) The literature review shows that high performing governance takes place when the main task of the Chair is efficiently chairing governance meetings and providing directional leadership.” Board Chairs’ Practices across Countries: Commonalities, Differences, and Future Trends”,

Page 30 of 34
aforementioned governance practices for delegates who take on governance (28%), and improved monitoring and follow-up of implementation of Resolutions and Decisions (50%). In the report it has been shown through the desk review that there are responsibilities and procedures set out in Resolutions which address these issues. However, despite this, CPs have responded that more is needed.

These views will also be taken into account when considering possible changes to the governance procedures.
Annex 1: Final Evaluation Questions

NOTE: The words “governance body/bodies” used below mean any of the entities within the Ramsar Convention which have a mandate and carry out tasks that are related to the governance of the Ramsar Convention, be they explicitly set out in the text of the Convention or created to support the governance of the Ramsar Convention.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Questions</th>
<th>MEQ1.1 Which top 3 governance-related skills and/or practices do you feel the various governance bodies need to have and do well in order for them to best support Ramsar's ability to deliver on its Vision and Mission?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Governance</td>
<td>MEQ1.2 Beyond the Rules of Procedure, which standard governance-related procedures do you feel are needed within and between the governance bodies in order for them to best support Ramsar's ability to deliver on its Vision and Mission?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OEQ1 What are the critical success factors and ways of working?</td>
<td>MEQ 2.1 Do the governance bodies have clear delegated mandates allocated to them? Are there gaps or overlaps that you are aware of?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OEQ2 What level of clarity exists around the bodies' roles and responsibilities?</td>
<td>MEQ 2.2 Do the Party representatives of the governance bodies clearly understand how, and the extent to which, they contribute to the governance of Ramsar?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OEQ3 What is the perceived legitimacy of Ramsar's governance?</td>
<td>MEQ 2.3 Do the Party representatives on the governance bodies understand the requirements and obligations of the positions they are filling based on clear information which is expressly stated and accessible for all?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OEQ4 What level of transparency exists around the bodies' roles and responsibilities?</td>
<td>MEQ 2.4 Are decisions that are taken, or recommendations made, by any of the governance bodies clear and enacted in a manner that follows agreed-upon rules?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity - Mandate, tasks and responsibilities for decisions and actions in the Convention are clearly delineated, allocated and accepted</td>
<td>MEQ 3.1 Is each governance body representative of the Convention’s Parties?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEQ 3.2 Are all contracting parties informed and empowered to validate or question all decisions taken by the Convention?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Accountability - The decision-making bodies of the Convention are accessible to their stakeholders, who are informed and empowered to question decisions taken. All parties are seen as responsible and accountable for the decisions they take.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OEQ4</th>
<th>What is the extent to which the bodies are held accountable for fulfilling their mandates?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEQ 3.3</td>
<td>Are the Party representatives on the governance bodies chosen and appointed in a representative manner?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEQ 3.4</td>
<td>Are decisions and actions clearly related to issues discussed at the meetings of the governance bodies and accepted by all parties?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| MEQ 4.1 | Are decision-making bodies [COP, SC] of the Convention accessible and accountable for the decisions they take? |
| MEQ 4.2 | Does the governance structure include a review mechanism to objectively assess bodies' fulfilment of their functions? |
| MEQ 4.3 | How successful are the mechanisms currently in place for supporting Parties' abilities to enhance their implementation of the Convention including through its resolutions? Is there opportunity for improvement? |

### Effectiveness - The governance bodies deliver, in a timely and effective manner, on the objectives set out by their mandates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OEQ5</th>
<th>How well reflected in the Convention’s governance-related performance are the desired key skills or practices needed of high performing convention bodies?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEQ 5.1</td>
<td>Were any of the major factors influencing the achievements of the Convention's objectives in the last trimester related to governance actions or practices?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEQ 5.2</td>
<td>Do governance bodies have a good mix of skills, knowledge and experience to deliver on their duties? If not, what is missing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEQ 5.3</td>
<td>Do Parties have access to key information needed to make informed decisions, with information freely available and accessible to those who will be responsible for implementing such decisions and their respective enforcement?</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>OEQ6</th>
<th>What is the level of effectiveness of current governance-related processes in...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEQ 6.1</td>
<td>Do the governance-related processes that are in place today support the governance bodies, and the Convention more broadly, to be effective?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Ramsar’s critical functions?</td>
<td>MEQ 6.2 Where a governance body relies on subgroups to contribute on issues related to governance, are they used wisely, in a timely and effective manner?</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------</td>
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</table>
| Cost - The cost of governance is justifiable relative to its impact on delivering results for the Convention. | **OEQ7 How does Ramsar’s governance support the Convention’s sustainability?**

- **MEQ7.1** Do the mandates of the COP, SC, Sub-Group on Finance, and MWG allow for sufficient and robust discussion about the organisation’s financial wellbeing?
- **MEQ7.2** Do the mandates and processes of the COP, SC, Sub-Group on Finance, and MWG permit (or encourage) regular reviews of current and future risks to the organisation’s financial sustainability?
- **MEQ 7.3** Is the overall governance of the convention as cost-efficient as it could be? If you feel it is not, do you know of any tools or processes which would make the overall governance of the convention more cost-efficient? |