



10th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the
Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

“Healthy wetlands, healthy people”

Changwon, Republic of Korea,
28 October-4 November 2008

Agenda item XV

Ramsar COP10 DR 6

Draft Resolution X.6

**Regional initiatives 2009-2012 in the framework of the Ramsar
Convention**

(see also COP10 DOC 15 for further information on progress and issues concerning regional initiatives operating within the framework of the Convention)

Submitted by the Standing Committee

1. RECALLING that the *Guidelines for international cooperation under the Ramsar Convention* (Resolution VII.19, 1999) provide the appropriate framework for promoting international collaboration amongst Contracting Parties and other partners;
2. ALSO RECALLING that in Resolution VIII.30 (2002) the Contracting Parties recognized the importance of regional initiatives in promoting the objectives of the Convention and established *Guidelines for the development of regional initiatives in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands*;
3. FURTHER RECALLING that Resolution IX.7 (2005) endorsed a number of regional initiatives as operating within the framework of the Convention in 2006-2008 and recognized the potential of a number of other initiatives to become operational within the framework of the Convention;
4. NOTING the substantial progress that many of these initiatives have made during the years 2006-2008 as regularly reported and assessed by Standing Committee;
5. FURTHER NOTING that a number of new proposals were submitted to Standing Committee prior to this meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties; and
6. TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the experience gained through the first operational years of these initiatives and the conclusions derived from the assessment by Standing Committee with a strategic view for the future development of regional initiatives;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

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7. ADOPTS the annexed Operational Criteria for regional initiatives to support the implementation of the Convention, which shall serve as a reference to assess the operation of regional initiatives and their success – the Operational Criteria are based upon, and they replace, the guidance for the development of proposals for regional initiatives adopted by COP8 (Annex I to Resolution VIII.30);
8. AUTHORIZES the Standing Committee to examine and approve, between meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, selected initiatives which fully meet the Operational Criteria listed in the annex to the Resolution as operating within the framework of the Convention, based upon updated information provided through regular annual reports to be submitted to the Secretariat;
9. AGREES to earmark a global amount of financial support in the Convention core budget line “Support to Regional Initiatives”, as listed in [draft Resolution X.2 on financial and budgetary matters], to be allocated to regional initiatives during the period 2009-2012, elements of which are both regional centres for training and capacity-building and regional networks for cooperation and capacity-building, provided that they fully meet the Operational Criteria;
10. DECIDES that the levels of financial support to individual initiatives for the years 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 through this budget line will be determined by the Standing Committee during its annual meetings at the beginning of these years, based upon updated financial and work plans to be submitted in the required format and in good time prior to the annual meetings, and following the specific recommendations made by the Subgroup on Finance;
11. INSTRUCTS all initiatives under the present Resolution, and particularly those funded from the core budget, to submit to the Standing Committee annual reports on progress and operations of the initiatives concerned, and specifically on their success in fulfilling the Operational Criteria;
12. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, intergovernmental agencies, International Organization Partners, national NGOs and other potential donors to support such regional initiatives seeking financial assistance from the Ramsar Convention with additional voluntary contributions;
13. STRONGLY URGES those regional initiatives that receive initial financial support from the core budget to use this support *inter alia* to seek alternative flows of sustainable funding;
14. AUTHORIZES the Secretary General seek the approval of the Standing Committee to conclude, where appropriate, time-limited Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with relevant governments and appropriate bodies with regard to the specific financial and institutional arrangements of the regional initiatives approved by the Standing Committee, and DIRECTS the Secretary General to report to the Standing Committee and COP11 on progress with these MoUs and the progress of regional initiatives in general;
15. INSTRUCTS the Secretariat to develop for Standing Committee approval evaluation criteria and procedures for external evaluations of the regional initiatives operating within the framework of the Convention. Ten percent of the Ramsar core budget allocation for

regional initiatives is to be earmarked to cover the costs of such evaluation procedures under the direction of the Secretariat; and

16. REQUESTS the Standing Committee and the Secretariat, particularly in relation to those initiatives funded by the core budget, to review their success and submit a summary report for consideration at COP11.

Annex

Operational Criteria 2009-2012 for regional initiatives in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands

The aim of regional initiatives

1. Regional initiatives under the Ramsar Convention are intended as operational means to provide effective support for an improved implementation of the objectives of the Convention and its Strategic Plan in specific geographical regions, through international cooperation on wetland-related issues of common concern.
2. Geographical regions to be covered by specific initiatives are defined according to the wetland-related needs of the relevant actors in the region. In practical terms, a regional initiative may correspond to one of the six regional groups established by the Convention through Resolution VII.1 (1999), but it may also be more restricted in geographical focus or span several regional groups defined in Resolution VII.1, if the Contracting Parties concerned consider that to be more appropriate.
3. Because regional initiatives are intended to provide lasting, structural and operational support to facilitating and improving the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in a defined geographical region, they depend upon receiving support from all Contracting Parties in the region concerned. Sufficient support is essential to setting up a minimal operational structure for effective work in the region.
4. Regional initiatives that are fully consistent with the aims listed above are different from regional projects. Regional projects are joint activities or programmes proposed by several Contracting Parties for a given geographical region, focusing on specific aspects, often limited in time. Regional projects can be the operational means for delivering specific aspects of regional initiatives, but should not be confused with the latter.

Coordination between regional initiatives and the Secretariat

5. The development of effective coordination measures between regional initiatives, acting regionally, and the Ramsar Secretariat, acting globally and being responsible to the Standing Committee and the COP, is essential. To achieve this, the number of regional initiatives needs to be limited to a small number of well-functioning and well-established initiatives with a long-term focus. The creation of a multitude of different regional structures would place excessive oversight demands on the Ramsar Secretariat staff and should be avoided at all cost.

6. The Ramsar Secretariat has no capacity to develop, coordinate or run regional initiatives; but it will endeavour to the best of its ability to assist them, including through mobilization of additional resources. The role of the Secretariat is to maintain regular links with the regional initiatives, to advise them, to make sure that global Ramsar standards are applied throughout the different regions, and that their strategic and operational targets are fully aligned with the Convention's Strategic Plan. The Secretariat must receive regular reports from the regional initiatives to be able to report to Standing Committee and the COP on their progress as required.
7. The complementary roles of the coordinating bodies of regional initiatives and the Ramsar Secretariat and their respective responsibilities need to be defined in written arrangements between the Ramsar Secretariat and each initiative. This is to assure that the respective work of the Secretariat and the regional initiatives are complementary and provide added value rather than creating a duplication of efforts or an unhelpful overlap. Such arrangements will be submitted to Standing Committee for approval or modification where needed.
8. The establishment of regional initiatives is a process over time. In order to fulfill their aims, regional initiatives depend on the services provided by professional staff who can assure a minimal coordination between the Contracting Parties and other members participating in the initiative. Contracting Parties or other members participating in a regional initiative need to provide such services.
9. The coordinating bodies of regional initiatives should aim to develop the capacity to take on the additional role of coordinating and supervising regional projects. Projects and programmes to support the initiative through actions with a geographically or thematically more restricted focus, often limited in time, are likely to develop increasingly over time. They should not put excessive demands on the global Ramsar Secretariat, but rather should be supervised by the coordinating bodies of regional initiatives.
10. Professional staff of regional initiatives who supervise regional projects fulfill a complementary function to the Ramsar Secretariat that it does not have the capacity to fulfill. In doing so, regional initiatives add substantial implementation capacity for the Convention in the region.

Governance of initiatives

11. Regional initiatives need to become firmly established in their geographical region. They must establish their own governance and advisory mechanisms, involving all relevant Contracting Parties and other appropriate stakeholders, in order to provide guidance and insight.
12. In order to establish a professional coordination body, the administrative and financial support of a host country is essential. However, where established, the coordination body will be responsible to all members that constitute a regional initiative (Contracting Parties and other members), not only to the host country. Elaborating equitable and transparent governing and organizational structures is essential. They need to be laid down in commonly agreed terms of reference, rules of procedure, or operational guidance.

13. The Conference of the Parties and the Standing Committee shall receive, through the Secretariat, reports on the activities of regional initiatives and shall oversee their general policies relating to the implementation of the Convention.

Substantive elements of initiatives

14. Regional initiatives should be based on a bottom-up approach. As a matter of priority, the involvement of all Contracting Parties of the specific region covered by the initiative should be sought from the start.
15. Each initiative should entail the participation, from the start, not only of the Administrative Authorities responsible for the application of the Convention in the Contracting Parties involved, but also of all other relevant stakeholders with an interest in and directly or indirectly responsible for wetland issues, including the ministries responsible for the environment and water issues, intergovernmental bodies, Ramsar International Organization Partners (IOPs), other NGOs, academia, and economic actors.
16. A regional initiative should base its operation on the development of networks of collaboration established upon clearly defined terms of reference, thus creating an enabling environment for the involvement of all stakeholders at all levels.
17. At an early stage, a regional initiative should seek collaboration with other intergovernmental or international partners and Ramsar IOPs operating in its region, by establishing complementary and non-duplicative activities.
18. The operation of a regional initiative should be focused upon making optimal use of the Ramsar tools (frameworks, guidelines, guidance, methodologies, etc.) published in the Ramsar Handbook and Technical Reports series, and it should be based upon strong scientific and technical backing provided by relevant institutions which should be recognized as partners in the initiative.
19. The strategic and operational targets of a regional initiative should be fully aligned with the Strategic Plan of the Convention by means of policy and site technical work and activities.
20. Regional initiatives need to raise the visibility of the Ramsar Convention and the general awareness of Ramsar objectives. Specific activities in the fields of communication, education and participatory processes with relevant stakeholders should be included in their work plans. The outcomes of such activities should be communicated to the Secretariat for use by the Ramsar CEPA Oversight Panel.

Financial and other support

21. A regional initiative requires both political and financial support from all Contracting Parties and other relevant partners in the region. A substantial support from a host country is especially important if a coordinating office is to be established.
22. The launching of a regional initiative needs to rely upon secured funding for planned work, activities and projects.

23. Financial support for a regional initiative from the Convention's core budget, should the COP and Standing Committee so decide, will only be provided as start-up funding, time-limited for a pre-determined period – in principle not more than the interval between two meetings of the COP. After that period, the initiative should be self-sustaining, and the Ramsar core support for it will be allocated to other initiatives instead. However, in cases where a regional centre continues to fully meet the Operational Criteria such support may continue.
24. The Ramsar meeting of the COP allocates a specific amount of funding to the core budget line for regional initiatives for the time until the next meeting of the COP. Based on this global amount, the Standing Committee allocates specific funds to individual initiatives on an annual basis. This annual allocation will be based on individual reports to be submitted in good time in a standard format to the Secretariat. These reports will provide information on the operational readiness and the urgency of Ramsar core funding needs by the initiative during the coming year.
25. Regional initiatives need to generate their own resources and become financially self-sufficient after an initial start-up phase and in the long term. When deciding financial support from the Convention's core budget, geographically equitable distribution will be taken into account over the long term. This is not always possible during a single interval between two meetings of the COP, for which proposals must be weighted on their merits and readiness to operate.

Reporting and evaluation

26. Regional initiatives that are recognized by the COP as operating within the framework of the Convention must submit progress reports to the Secretariat, according to a standard format, in time to allow adequate reporting to the next meeting of the COP. If they wish to continue to be formally recognized as operating within the framework of the Convention during the next interval between two meetings of the COP, this needs to be expressed in their formal report, regardless of whether or not they are receiving or hope to receive Ramsar core budget funds.
27. Annual reports of progress and financial status are required from regional initiatives requesting funding from the Ramsar core budget. Such reports have to reach the Secretariat in time for the preparation of the annual meeting of Standing Committee.
28. Disbursement of Ramsar funds will be undertaken at six-monthly intervals, based on a short progress report of activities and financial status to be submitted by the beneficiaries to the Secretariat.
29. Ten percent of the global allocation approved by the COP in the Ramsar core budget line for regional initiatives will be allocated to cover costs of periodic external assessment and review processes for the initiatives. The Secretariat will coordinate such evaluation processes, according to specific rules to be approved by the Standing Committee. These review procedures are meant to assure that the regional initiatives are operating within the framework of agreed work plans and following the approaches approved by the Ramsar Convention through COP decisions.