11th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

"Wetlands: home and destination"

Bucharest, Romania, 6-13 July 2012

Agenda items VIII, XV **Ramsar COP11 DOC. 26**

Ensuring efficient delivery of scientific and technical advice and support to the Convention

Information paper to support Draft Resolution 16.
Prepared by the STRP Chair

1) Scope and purpose of this information paper

1. This paper provides additional information to support Ramsar's Contracting Parties at the 11th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP11) in their deliberations on Draft Resolution 16 (DR16, "Ensuring efficient delivery of scientific and technical advice and support to the Convention"). It draws upon discussions within the informal working group established by Standing Committee decision 43-12, discussions in the 42nd and 43rd meetings of the Standing Committee, and ongoing discussions within the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP). (See Annex 1 for a list of working group members).

2. The purpose of the paper is to provide background information and offer some reflections on the ways in which scientific and technical advice and support have been and are currently being delivered within Convention processes. It provides an initial and not exhaustive identification of some key strengths and weaknesses in the current arrangements for delivery of scientific and technical advice and support to the Convention, in order for these to be considered further in the work of the review committee proposed for establishment in DR16.

3. The Chair of the STRP is grateful for the assistance of the members of the informal working group, the STRP, and various Secretariat staff members in providing their candid and constructive inputs to the development of both this paper and DR16.

2) Background

4. Ramsar has always been a practical, science-based Convention, and the role of scientific and technical knowledge, advice and support to Convention implementation, particularly in the designation and management of Ramsar Sites, has always been recognized as crucial. Indeed, the Convention itself was founded on scientific studies from the 1960s which demonstrated the rate of loss of wetlands at that time through Project MAR (Hoffman, 1964) and other initiatives.

5. Initially, scientific advice and support to the Convention was provided by partner organizations such as the IWRB. However, increasing demands for support were reflected in the discussions at COP4 in 1990, and this resulted in a decision at COP5 (Resolution 5.5: Kushiro, 1993) to establish a Scientific and Technical Review Panel as a formal subsidiary body of the Convention. Since 1993, the composition, modus operandi and scope of work of the STRP have continued to evolve in response to changing needs for scientific and technical information, advice and support as well as growth in demand for such support as a result of the increasing number of Contracting Parties and number of Ramsar Sites. A more detailed analysis of the history and evolution of the STRP and its *modus operandi*, which includes an analysis of participation in STRP-related processes, is currently being prepared (MacKay *et al.*, 2012; see also Annex 2 of this document).

6. There is as yet no central facility within the Convention or the Secretariat where the number, nature and origin of requests for scientific and technical information, advice and support are recorded and tracked, so it is not possible at present to quantitatively analyze trends in the numbers of requests or to investigate trends in the nature of the issues and topics for which support has been requested. However, the responses to changing and growing needs are reflected to some degree in the differences between the scope of work plans of the STRP in its early phase and of its more recent work plans, as well as in the range of topics addressed in scientific and technical Resolutions adopted by the Convention (MacKay *et al.*, 2012).

3) Range of scientific and technical advice and support currently offered

7. Over the years, the Convention has developed a number of different categories of scientific and technical support products, delivered by different groups within the Convention's various bodies and processes. These include, *inter alia*:

   a) New or revised Ramsar guidance for Contracting Parties

      This category primarily includes formal guidance products prepared by the STRP that are intended to assist Parties to meet their commitments under the Convention. The target audience is Ramsar Administrative Authorities but can also include Ramsar Site managers. Generally these would be guidance products on specific topics, requested or mandated by the Conference of the Parties and delivered to a subsequent COP for adoption.

   b) Technical support and advice for Convention implementation – ongoing and *ad hoc*

      This refers to work that contributes to regular Convention business procedures and reporting, or to provision of *ad hoc* advice to Parties, wetland managers or other entities on specific topics. This can include Ramsar Advisory Missions, implementation support, training, and some CEPA products. The primary target audience might vary, and the nature of the products varies depending on the needs. This category is "inward-focused" work, i.e. communicating inwards to Convention processes.

   c) Global information products and engagement in other global or sectoral processes

This category includes provision of advice or reports to Parties on global information products and assessments as these relate to wetlands, normally responding to requests for wetland-related information or participation in other global processes (for example, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, TEEB, and policy processes in sectors such as water, urban planning and management, agriculture, energy). This is "outward-focused" work, i.e., communicating with groups and processes outside the Convention whose mandates and activities influence Convention implementation.

d) Emerging issues and future priority issues

This category covers "horizon scanning", identification and development of future priority issues for the Convention, primarily led by STRP. Products include Scientific and Technical Briefing Notes, some of which will provide starting points for future work to be taken up within the Convention.

e) Scientific or technical products and initiatives undertaken by other relevant organizations

This category includes scientific or technical products which the STRP identifies as potentially being useful for Ramsar Parties, but which are well beyond the STRP's mandate or mission to undertake, and hence the Convention might make a request to a relevant "other" organization to deliver that for us through a Memorandum of Cooperation of some sort or through a request from the COP.

4) Range of target audiences and end users for Ramsar's scientific and technical advice, information and support

8. There is a fairly broad and diverse range of actual and potential target audiences and end users of Ramsar's scientific and technical advice, information and support. Some are directly responsible for implementation of the Convention either at national level or with regard to individual Ramsar Sites; other groups include stakeholders and communities dependent on wetlands and their ecosystem services, and others involve sectors whose activities influence the wise use of wetlands and the ultimate success of Convention implementation. These target audiences and end users can have widely differing needs in terms of the nature, scope and scale of issues of concern to them, and they generally require quite different types of scientific and technical products or support.

9. The range of target audiences and end users includes, but is not limited to:

- managers of individual wetland sites as well as managers of networks of wetlands such as on flyways;
- wetland policy makers and those responsible for regulating the use of and impacts on wetlands;
- policy makers in other sectors such as water, agriculture, health, urban development, and energy, including those at national, regional and global levels;
- stakeholders and local communities who may depend upon wetlands and wetland ecosystem services;

- educators and researchers; and
- private sector organizations.

5) Range of mechanisms for delivering scientific and technical advice and support in Convention processes

10. All bodies of the Convention, including the Contracting Parties, the Standing Committee, the Secretariat, the Conference of the Parties, and the STRP, and others such as National Ramsar Committees, the national focal points, and the International Organization Partners (IOPs), have roles to play in ensuring that scientific and technical support is delivered in ways that support effective implementation of the objectives of the Convention.

11. The effective delivery and uptake of scientific advice, support and information, at all scales and to diverse target audiences, are also enhanced by collaboration and appropriate partnerships with other scientific organizations, observer organizations, private sector groups, academic organizations, and their scientific networks in the Ramsar regions.

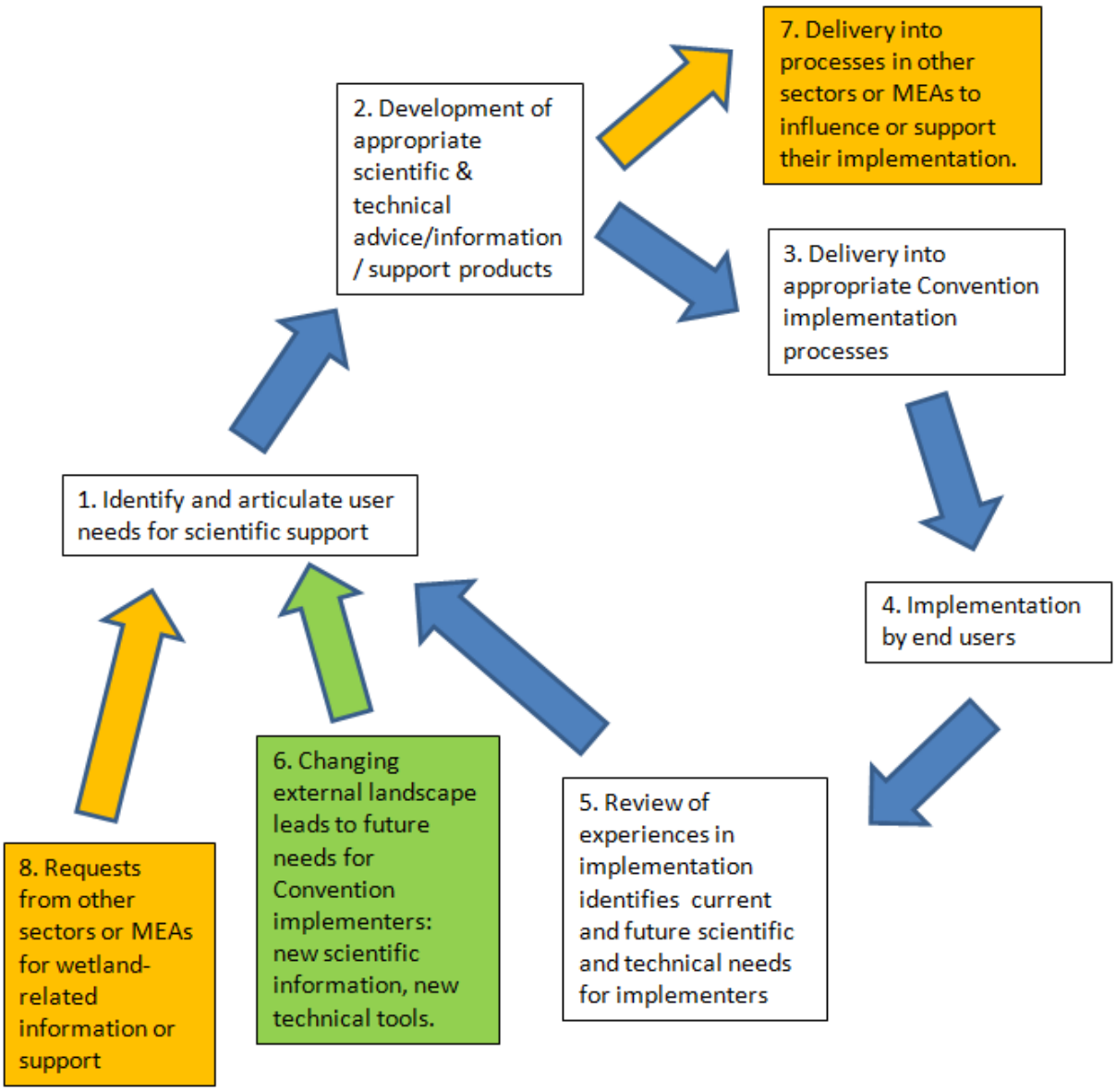
12. This complex landscape of entities, processes and demands continues to evolve as the Convention itself evolves and grows, even while the world around the Convention becomes increasingly complex and interdependent. Very significant capacity and resources are contained within this landscape, but these are not always mobilized or even recognized as potentially contributing to the success of scientific advice and support for Ramsar. This highlights the importance of clarifying different roles and responsibilities as far as possible, in order to ensure effective coordination and communication in working to deliver scientific and technical information and support to enhance the implementation of the Convention.

6) Understanding the limitations and strengths of current processes for delivering different kinds of support for different end users and implementers

13. Figure 1 is a schematic representation of an underlying cyclical and currently implicit process for identifying scientific and technical needs and priorities, developing products to meet those needs, and then delivering those products for uptake into Convention implementation processes. The diagram reflects a simplification of the actual situation, since as noted above there are multiple target audiences with differing needs at various scales, and there are multiple ways to deliver products, depending on who has been tasked with the responsibility for developing, delivering and implementing a particular product or type of information or guidance. Resources and capacity are limited in all parts of the cycle, so efficiency is imperative in making best use of available resources and capacity where they are found. Likewise, clarity in defining roles and responsibilities is also crucial, in order to ensure a smooth handoff from the entity or group responsible for one part of the cycle to the next. For example, the STRP might develop formal guidance on an aspect of Ramsar Site management (in box 2 of figure 1), Contracting Parties might then adopt the guidance (box 3) and Ramsar Site managers would be responsible for implementing it (box 4).

14. Considering this model in relation to Ramsar's current processes for delivering scientific and technical advice and support allows identification of some of the strengths and weaknesses of current processes in the Convention.

Figure 1: The science-policy-implementation cycle



15. **What happens in each "box" activity, and who participates, are important to making the whole cycle efficient.**

16. For example, the identification and articulation of user needs for scientific and technical information and support (box 1) has been identified in several recent discussions (see SC and STRP reports and the analysis in "An evaluation of the use and utility of Ramsar guidance" (van Boven), as well as in COP10 DOC.21) as an area which needs attention.

17. By way of explanation, key inputs to understanding and identifying user needs arise from three sources:

    i) a review of experiences in implementation from within the Ramsar Convention processes (box 5);

ii) a review of external drivers outside the Convention which could influence the conservation and wise use of wetlands (box 6); and
iii) requests from other sectors or MEAs for wetlands-related scientific information or support (box 8).

18. The incorporation of external drivers into the development of future priorities for scientific and technical support has been strengthened over the years by fairly robust debate and engagement of observer organizations with STRP processes (see Annex 2). However, there are no strong equivalent mechanisms for encouraging Convention implementers and end users (primarily the Administrative Authorities and wetland managers) to bring their implementation experiences and priorities into the development of future scientific priorities for the Convention. The regional meetings, Standing Committee meetings, and meetings of the COP offer some potential opportunities for doing so, as does the national focal point system, but processes for providing feedback from "on-the-ground" implementation to the Convention and the STRP remain somewhat *ad hoc* and rather variable in their application.

19. **What happens and who participates in the "arrow" parts of the cycle are perhaps even more important for efficient delivery.**

20. This is where the handoff occurs from one lead group or entity to the next in the cycle, and it is frequently problematic in Ramsar as the Convention has evolved rather organically to include multiple bodies such as the COP, the Administrative Authorities, the Secretariat, the CEPA panel, the STRP and the national focal point system. Responsibilities and relationships are not always clear, leading to some significant weaknesses, for example in delivery of adopted guidance from the COP to wetland managers on the ground (as was noted in the review "An evaluation of the use and utility of Ramsar guidance" and COP10 DOC. 21).

7) Implications for prioritized or new Convention processes for delivery and uptake of scientific and technical advice and support

21. While demands for scientific and technical information, support and advice have been growing over the years, resources and capacity at the Convention's central level, i.e., within the Secretariat, the STRP's core membership, and the CEPA Panel, remain severely constrained. The current arrangements for delivering scientific and technical support are no longer adequate for some categories of support, particularly those which require significant on-the-ground presence.

22. Beyond review and possible changes to the arrangements within the Convention, a number of opportunities exist for improving and enhancing the delivery and uptake of scientific and technical support to the Convention, for example:

- In-country networks, IOPs and observers offer a capacity for advice which is currently under-utilized, but could be mobilized through stronger in-country processes.
- The IPBES is intended as a science-policy interface which will operate at various levels. Ramsar has existing science-policy interfaces at various levels, such as National Ramsar Committees, and significant synergies might be achieved through

collaboration between Ramsar and IPBES interfaces, although we should also recognize the transaction costs associated with such collaboration.

- Growing recognition of wetlands as natural water infrastructure that is important for water quality and supply should lead to a higher profile for wetlands and hence more demands for wetland information and expertise. This could provide opportunities to increase and build capacity and expertise in planning and management for wise use of wetlands and related (water) services.

23. Collaboration between the biodiversity-related MEAs and conventions has increased significantly in recent years, assisted by the establishment of the CSAB group (the Chairs of the Scientific Advisory Bodies of the biodiversity-related conventions). Increasingly Ramsar is seen as a source and repository of credible global scientific information on wetlands and their ecosystem services. Ramsar has a clear existing relationship and responsibilities to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), as Ramsar is the implementing agent for the CBD programme of work on Inland Waters, and a formal Joint Work Plan between the two bodies provides for specific wetland-related scientific information and other support to be delivered to the CBD processes. As the demands for collaboration with and delivery to a range of other MEAs and sectoral processes continues to increase, Ramsar may need to mobilize capacity to meet those demands, too. Robust delivery mechanisms and strategic prioritization of resource allocations will need to be considered in order to balance the internal and external demands for scientific information, advice and support related to wetlands.

References

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http://www.ramsar.org/pdf/strp/Use_utility_Ramsar_guidance_report.pdf

Annex 1: Members of the informal working group established through Standing Committee decision 43-12

Core members:

M. Olivier Biber, Switzerland
Mr Lars Dinesen, Denmark
Mr Ainsley Henry, Jamaica
Mr Lew Young, Ramsar Secretariat
Mr David Stroud, United Kingdom, STRP
Ms Rebecca d'Cruz, Malaysia, STRP
Mr Chris Gordon, Ghana, STRP
Mr Mark Smith, IUCN
Ms Heather MacKay, STRP Chair

Copied on working group discussion for their information and comments:

Mr Anada Tiega, Secretary General
Mr Nick Davidson, Secretariat
Mr Tobias Salathe, Secretariat
Ms Maria Rivera, Secretariat
Mr Paul Ouedraogo, Secretariat

Annex 2: Selected results of analysis of participation in STRP-related processes 1993-2011

The following two graphs are included in the more detailed draft paper entitled "Analysis of the composition of the Ramsar Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel and participation in STRP-related processes during the period 1993-2011."

Points to note from these graphs:

- Significant and ongoing growth in overall participation in STRP processes (measured by active participation in STRP meetings);
- Steady growth in the number of COP-invited observer organizations participating in STRP-related processes since COP5, with most of these being IGOs, MEAs or other types of international organizations that bring broad global perspectives and expertise to the meetings;
- Increasingly, STRP members and invited experts work in the private sector (note growth in the last three cycles), reflecting a shift in location of Ramsar's wetland scientific expertise from government agencies to universities and consulting organizations;
- Since the data was derived from participants' lists from formal STRP meetings, this analysis does not include any assessment of activities of STRP National Focal Points in Ramsar-related processes in their own countries. On occasion, some STRP NFPs have participated in STRP meetings, and then they are included in the category of "IS and other observers".

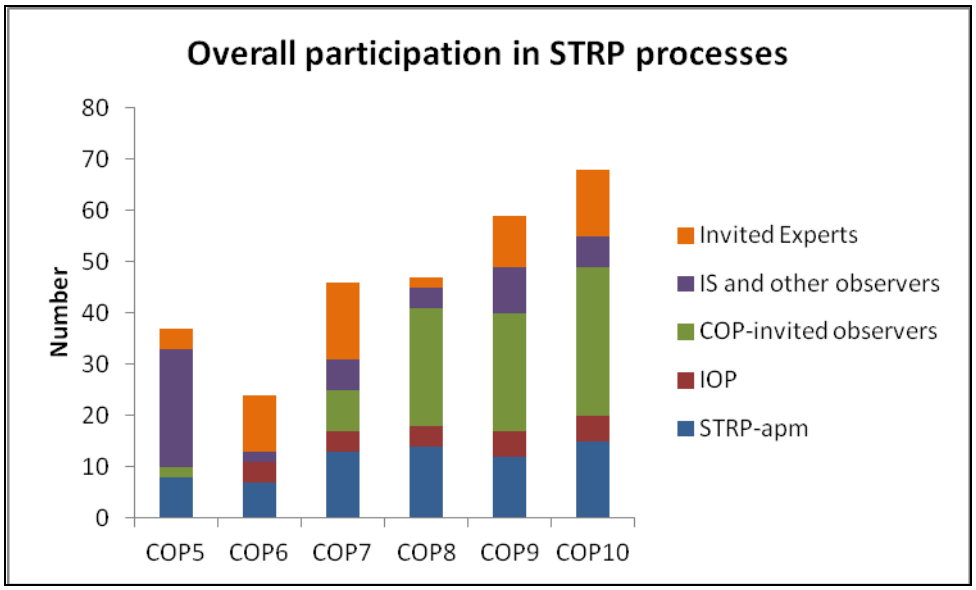

Figure A: Graph of overall participation in STRP processes over time.
For STRP-apm (STRP appointed Panel members) and Invited Experts, the count is by individual person. For all others, the count is by organization, even if more than one delegate per organization attended meetings. Ramsar Secretariat staff members are not included in this analysis. Codes: IS=intersessional; IOP=International Organization Partner; STRP-apm=STRP appointed member. Horizontal axis: time steps reflect the triennium following each COP. Reproduced from MacKay *et al.*, 2012.

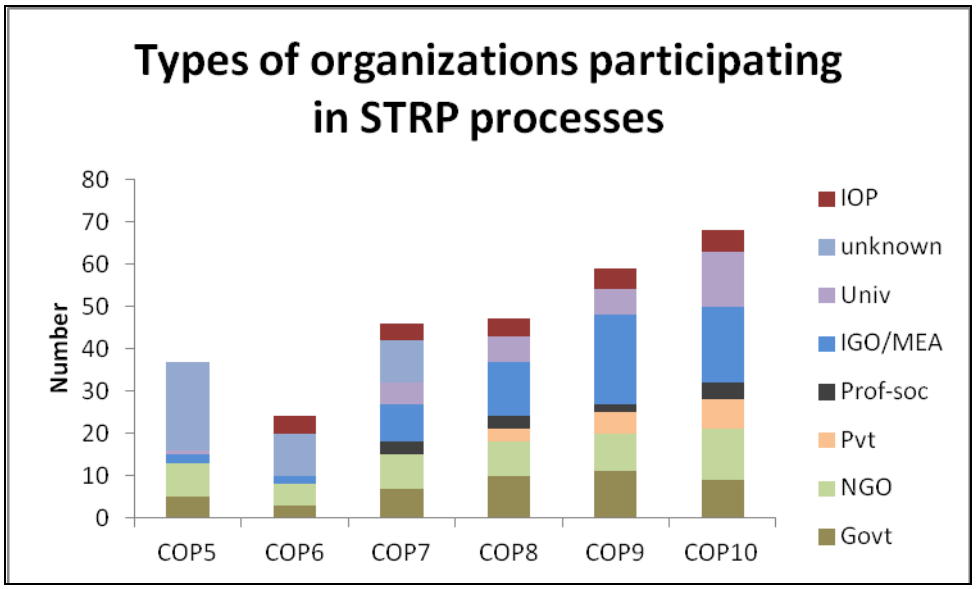

Figure B: Analysis of the types of organizations represented in STRP processes. Includes STRP members, IOPs, observers, and invited experts. For STRP members and invited experts, the count is per individual person. For observers and IOPs, the count is per organization, even if more than one delegate represented an organization at a meeting. Univ= university faculty members; IGO/MEA= Intergovernmental organization or multilateral environmental agreement; Prof-soc=Professional scientific society; Pvt=private sector practitioner/consultant; NGO=non-government organization; Govt=national government organization/agency. Horizontal axis: time steps reflect the triennium following each COP. Reproduced from MacKay *et al.*, 2012.