

Agenda item 6.3

Regional initiatives 2009-2011 in the framework of the Ramsar Convention

Action requested: Standing Committee is invited to comment on the proposed operational criteria for regional initiatives, on the proposed clarification of the roles of regional centres, and on the proposed criteria for initiatives to fulfill umbrella functions in their region.

Standing Committee is further invited to consider the attached Draft Resolution for COP10 on this matter, including the annexed operational criteria and the operational proposals for the triennium 2009-2011.

Note from the Secretariat

This document provides a summary of the development of Ramsar regional initiatives and an analysis of problems encountered during the current triennium. Based on the lessons learnt, which have been addressed during recent SC meetings, the paper makes proposals on the way forward. As a main new tool, it proposes “operational criteria” against which initiatives asking for endorsement by COP10 should be assessed.

The texts of the 20 proposals received for ongoing and new regional initiatives are available in PDF format, unedited and in their original language (English, French or Spanish), at http://www.ramsar.org/sc/37/key_sc37_doc08_proposals.htm.

Development of regional initiatives over the years 2003-2008

1. At the 8th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP8), the Parties recognized the importance of regional initiatives in promoting the objectives of the Convention in general and in implementing the Ramsar Strategic Plan in particular as they can build upon biogeographic commonalities, shared wetland systems and wetland-dependent species, and solidly established common social and cultural links (Resolution VIII.30).
2. COP8 also recognized the critical importance of financial and political support from Contracting Parties to such initiatives and provided specific guidance for the development of regional initiatives in the framework of the Convention (in Annex I to Resolution VIII.30).
3. A new budget line “support to regional initiatives” was included in the Ramsar core budget, and at COP8 it was decided that financial support from this budget line should be provided during the triennium 2003-2005 to the well-established Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet), allocating 258,582 CHF to that programme for the triennium.

4. For the next triennium (2006-2008), Contracting Parties were invited to submit proposals for regional initiatives, prepared according to the guidance annexed to Resolution VIII.30. Based on such proposals, COP9 endorsed (through Resolution IX.7) nine regional initiatives as operating within the framework of the Ramsar Convention and appropriate for funding support from the Ramsar core budget in 2006-2008, i.e. seven regional networks, including MedWet, and two regional centres for training and capacity building.
5. The core budget line “support to regional initiatives” was maintained for the triennium 2006-2008 with a total sum of 687,572 CHF, and COP9 allocated specific funding for 2006 to four of the eight newly endorsed initiatives (West Africa, High Andean, and Ramsar centres in Panama and Iran). COP9 decided also to phase out Ramsar’s funding of MedWet, and to contribute, in declining steps during a second triennium 2006-2008, a total sum of 52,348 CHF to MedWet from this budget line.
6. While the allocations to MedWet for the entire triennium and to four new initiatives for 2006 were made by COP9 through Resolution IX.7, the Standing Committee was entrusted to allocate the remaining amounts of the budget line for 2007 and 2008 during its annual meetings. It did so by allocating annual funding support for 2007 and 2008 to the four initiatives listed above, plus to a fifth initiative for the Pacific Islands, which figured amongst those endorsed in 2005 by COP9 (Resolution IX.7).
7. Funding support to regional initiatives for both triennia together (2003-2008) amounted to a total of 945,854 CHF (2003-2005: 258,582 CHF, 2006-2008: 687,272 CHF), as detailed in the table below. MedWet received Ramsar core funding support during both triennia (2003-2005: 258,582 CHF and 2006-2008: 52,384 CHF), while the other five initiatives were only supported during the second triennium 2006-2008.
8. The table shows that funding was successfully spread over all six Ramsar regional groups defined in Resolution VII.1, despite their huge differences in size, number of countries, economic wealth, potential, and needs for regional (and subregional) initiatives.

2003-2008 (CHF)	Neotropics	North America	Europe	Africa	Asia	Oceania
MedWet			310,930			
Panama Centre	240,000					
Iran Centre					134,745	
WacoWet				127,700		
Pacific Islands						68,779
High Andes	64,000					
indicative totals*	184,000	120,000	103,644	231,343	238,388	68,779

* Amounts allocated to regional initiatives that cover countries belonging to more than one regional group are split in equal parts to the number of regional groups concerned, not reflecting real amounts of money spent in each of them.

Regional initiatives endorsed in 2005 without funding support and initiatives recognized as being in preparation

9. Three more regional activities were endorsed by COP9 as operating within the framework of the Convention and appropriate for funding in 2006-2008. They did not request Ramsar core funding, however: the ChadWet initiative for wetlands in the Lake Chad basin, NigerWet, a similar initiative for wetlands in the Niger river basin, and the partnership for wetland sites of international importance for East Asian-Australasian migratory waterbirds. They progressed significantly over the triennium.
10. In Resolution IX.7 the Parties also recognized that four additional proposals of regional initiatives had the potential for operating under the Convention, subject to their acceptance by the Contracting Parties concerned and further development and consideration by COP10. These were proposals for an Eastern African Ramsar centre and for wetland networks in the Himalayan, Carpathian, and Nordic-Baltic regions. All four have progressed with their preparatory work and are now submitting improved proposals for the triennium 2009-2011.

Proposals for regional initiatives submitted for consideration to SC37

11. In January 2008, the Secretariat proceeded in a similar way to that in 2005 (before COP9) and invited Contracting Parties to submit proposals for regional initiatives – ongoing or new – wishing to be formally endorsed by COP10 as operating in the framework of the Convention during the triennium 2009-2011.
12. Based on this call, the Secretariat received a total of 20 proposals, including eight ongoing initiatives, four proposals concerning the four initiatives recognized by COP9 as being in preparation, and eight new proposals for initiatives developed most recently. They are listed in the table below. (CHF = Swiss francs)

Initiative 2009-2011 CHF ^b	Ramsar funding request 2009-2011	Ramsar funding request 2009 (11.1) ^a	expenditure forecast 2009 (9.3) ^a
funded earlier and ongoing:			
MedWet	no funding requested		582,100
Panama Centre (Western Hemisphere)	70,800	23,600	332,000
Iran Centre (West & Central Asia)	210,000	70,000	242,000
High Andes	66,000	22,000	1,037,000
Pacific Islands	180,000	99,000	not available
East Asian- Australasian Flyway	no funding requested		not provided
Lake Chad Basin	no funding requested		not provided
Niger Basin	no funding requested		not provided
recognized in 2005 as being in preparation:			
Uganda Centre (East Africa)	87,500	87,500	100,800
Carpathian	75,000	25,000	104,300
Himalayan	238,300	79,000	not provided
Nordic-Baltic	no funding requested		not provided
newly submitted in 2008:			
Korea Centre			

(East Asia)	no funding requested		225,000
Black Sea	237,900	60,100	66,700
Caribbean Islands	75,000	25,000	25,000
Congo Basin	180,000	60,000	1,069,500
La Plata Basin	150,000	50,000	55,000
Lesser Flamingo Plan	350,000	200,000	not provided
Neotropical Mangroves	75,000	75,000	not provided
Nile Basin	no funding requested		not provided
Totals	1,995,500	876,200	

- a) referring to the number of the question in the proposal format,
b) all amounts in CHF, exchange rates: 1 CHF/USD, 1.58 CHF/EUR, rounded to 100 CHF.

13. Despite reminders from the Secretariat, no information was received concerning future plans for the initiative for West African coastal wetlands (WacoWet), supported during the triennium 2006-2008 with 127,000 CHF from the Ramsar core budget.

Lessons learnt in implementing regional initiatives during the triennium 2006-2008

14. A critical analysis of the MedWet experience 1991-2002 was already published at the occasion of COP8 to assist upcoming regional initiatives in other parts of the world (Papayannis: Regional action for wetlands, published in all three Ramsar languages). In addition, the start of the implementation of new initiatives during the current triennium provided useful lessons to be learnt.
15. Noteworthy achievements of regional initiatives include programmes involving several Contracting Parties, paying attention to shared challenges and seeking solutions to common problems. Regional initiatives operating at basin scale offered the most promising expectations because they are shaped within an enabling environment provided by a permanent river/lake basin organization or convention. Regional capacity was substantially increased through the work of regional centres. Some of the regional initiatives such as MedWet and the High Andes facilitate dialogue between Contracting Parties and enable links with the Ramsar International Organization Partners (IOPs).
16. The Standing Committee has also addressed difficulties related to the implementation of regional initiatives. From these discussions, it can be concluded that operational difficulties occurred essentially at three levels: a) because of the absence of sufficiently clear governance and reporting mechanisms, and their application, between the executive body of the initiative and its members and donors, b) because of a discrepancy between the planning process and the operational readiness to implement planned activities in a timely manner, and c) because of the absence or weakness of structures and procedures to provide the initiative with sufficient backing and long-term support. The SC discussions helped to better scope the aims and requirements of regional initiatives, and to clarify which developments need to be avoided in future.
17. This led to the conclusions that regional initiatives under the Convention need to provide operational means to support improved implementation of the Convention on the ground. They need to provide implementation support in the long term. They need to be based on

commonly agreed terms, and they need to benefit from sufficient political and financial support within the region. Regional initiatives should not duplicate the functions of the Ramsar Secretariat, but need to be complementary to its role and bring added benefits. While a minimum of coordination between regional initiatives and the Ramsar Secretariat is needed, the former should not generate excessive demands on the Secretariat staff. Ideally, regional initiatives will have to develop into “umbrella” structures that coordinate and supervise the implementation of programmes and projects for better wetland conservation and wise use in the region concerned.

Further clarification needed: the role of regional initiatives vs. the role of the Secretariat

18. Regional initiatives (i.e. networks and centres) are not intended to take up the role of the Convention Secretariat, nor to fulfill Secretariat functions in their region. Their role is complementary to the Secretariat. The major goal of regional initiatives is to increase the capacity and to provide additional support for better implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the region. Staff working for regional initiatives are not staff of the Ramsar Secretariat – their roles are different and they need to be complementary to the roles of Secretariat staff. While Ramsar Secretariat staff act on behalf of the Convention, regional staff cannot act on behalf of the Secretariat and should not be seen to be doing so. Regional initiatives are acting for the benefit of the Convention, but not in the name of it. It needs to be made clear in communication and outreach, including the appropriate use and reference to the “Ramsar” identity, name and logo, that regional initiatives are not regional offices of the Convention. They are set up to provide added value for better implementation of the Convention in the region, and need to avoid duplicating efforts with the Convention Secretariat. To this end, coordinating mechanisms need to be established between regional initiatives and the Ramsar Secretariat, and both need to be aware of the complementary functions of the other.

Further clarification needed: regional centres vs. regional networks

19. Resolution IX.7 separates regional networks for capacity-building and cooperation from regional centres for training and capacity-building. This underlines the slightly different nature of both. Regional centres have to fulfill the priority functions of providing training, facilitating exchange of expertise and knowledge, and coordinating and harmonizing technical, scientific and monitoring work in the region. By doing so, regional centres contribute significantly to build increased capacities in the region for a better implementation of the Ramsar obligations.
20. Regional networks are different in nature. Foremost, they provide a framework, or forum, for regional consultation, planning, cooperation, as well as for joint activities among Ramsar Contracting Parties and other additional actors in the region. To be effective, it is crucial for a regional network that all countries and all major stakeholders, representing all relevant different sectors, are cooperating in the framework of a regional initiative. In contrast, regional centres for capacity building and training can operate in a more flexible way, by responding to regional needs and opportunities. The essence of regional networks is, however, to provide a stable and well-supported forum for international discussion, consultation and action in a cooperative way covering common Ramsar issues and concerns.

Further clarification needed: the function of “umbrella” initiatives

21. The Secretariat proposes to clarify what is embodied in the idea of an “umbrella” initiative suggested by the Standing Committee? Based on the extensive experience with the operation of the MedWet Initiative, it appears that specific “umbrella” functions of a regional initiative may be summarized as its operational potential to take on the additional tasks of coordinating and supervising more specific and restricted regional projects, in terms of thematic, geographical or time-bound focus, while also playing a long-term strategic role as a true regional forum, bringing together all relevant countries and actors in the region.
22. Such “umbrella” functions would merit to be identified in more detail with a clear view to distinguish them from the functions of the Convention Secretariat, to make sure that they are complementary to the latter and support the goal of improving the implementation capacity of the Convention in the region, while not putting undue additional pressure to the work of the Secretariat. Standing Committee may want to ask the Secretariat to address this issue further in the report on progress with regional initiatives to be prepared for COP11, based on additional experience to be gained from initiatives operating during the triennium 2009-2011.

Clarification needed: regional initiatives vs. regional projects

23. Regional initiatives are different from projects, and the Secretariat proposes to recognize and clearly make this distinction. Initiatives aim to establish stable and lasting structures to increase the implementation capacity of the Convention in a given region. They need to be based on substantial political, technical and financial support in the long term from the countries and additional wetland actors in the region. Regional initiatives are an operational means to support all aspects to increase the implementation capacity for Ramsar approaches in the region. Projects, on the other hand, are focused upon specific objectives and aspects and are limited in time. As demonstrated by the operation of the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet) since 1991, regional initiatives provide a regional forum to develop, support and implement specific projects and to facilitate training and capacity-building programmes.
24. Many of the recent proposals submitted to the Secretariat are indeed not aiming to construct lasting operational means and cooperation structures, but focus instead on short-term cooperative actions among different countries towards specific and often time-bound objectives. Such proposals undoubtedly have significant merits as cooperative international projects, and should be financially supported by donor organizations specifically set up for project support. But they are clearly not responding to the needs to be covered by regional initiatives.

Operational proposals for COP10 and the triennium 2009-2011

25. The Secretariat proposes a step-wise procedure to address the different issues in a most effective way. This procedure should help to focus first on the main functions of regional initiatives and the support they need to provide to the Convention, before considering the question of how to allocate Ramsar core budget funds to different initiatives. It is to be noted, furthermore, that the Ramsar funding support requested through the 20 proposals

submitted to SC is likely to exceed substantially the funds that will be made available by COP10.

26. Following up on the lessons learnt and the conclusions outlined above, the Secretariat proposes to redress a number of operational difficulties, notably through addressing the need for:
 - a) improved reporting and governance mechanisms of regional initiatives and better clarification of the working and coordination relationships between the initiatives and the Ramsar Secretariat,
 - b) improved administrative procedures to provide Standing Committee with better information prior to its decision on how to allocate available core funds to individual initiatives at annual intervals, based on urgent funding needs and operational readiness of the beneficiary initiatives to spend the funds, and
 - c) regular evaluation procedures to clarify if the initiatives evolve towards the provision of long-term operational means for improved Ramsar implementation on the ground.
27. In order to draw up a list of regional initiatives to be endorsed as operating within the framework of the Convention, the Secretariat proposes that COP10 first adopt “Operational Criteria” as a reference against which proposals can be assessed as either corresponding to the requirements for endorsement or needing further preparatory work. The “Operational Criteria” (attached) are intended to expand and replace the “guidance for the development” of proposals for regional initiatives adopted by COP8 (Annex I to Resolution VIII.30), which have been used to assess the proposals so far.
28. Then, it is proposed that COP10, aware of the 20 proposals submitted to SC37 based on the guidance provided by COP8, and aware of the amount of financial support requested by these proposals from the Ramsar core budget, will allocate a global sum to the core budget line for Ramsar regional initiatives, specifying as in the past the respective amounts to be allocated for regional centres and for regional networks for the triennium 2009-2011.
29. Assuming that Standing Committee would propose to COP10 an allocation of similar amounts as in the past, this could mean a global allocation of 250,000 CHF or so at an annual basis, split up into 100,000 CHF annually for regional centres and 150,000 CHF annually for regional networks.
30. Many of the proposed regional initiatives have not yet finalized (or even started) their operational planning for 2009 and beyond. This is reflected in the quality (or absence) of information provided in the proposals submitted to the Secretariat (accessible on http://www.ramsar.org/sc/37/key_sc37_doc08_proposals.htm) and illustrated by the key indicator of expenditure forecast figures for 2009 (or its absence) in the table above. Thus, the Secretariat proposes that COP10 should not make individual funding allocations to proposed initiatives, but that this will be done subsequently by Standing Committee on an annual basis.

31. The first annual allocation for the triennium 2009-2011 would thus be made during the 40th meeting of the Standing Committee in early 2009. COP10 would request the initiatives seeking Ramsar endorsement and possible funding to submit an updated proposal, fully in line with the Operational Criteria to be adopted by COP10 and providing information which substantiates that they are ready to operate and to implement their commonly agreed work plan 2009 in a timely manner. The availability of updated reports in accordance with the Operational Criteria in early 2009 will put the Standing Committee in a much better position to make effective funding allocations, and should become an annual procedure.

Reporting on regional initiatives 2006-2008

32. In accordance with Resolution IX.7 paragraph 14, asking the Standing Committee and Secretariat to “review their success and submit a summary report for consideration at COP10”, the Secretariat proposes to prepare a short report responding to this request as an Information Document, based upon this paper.

Draft Resolution X.00

Regional initiatives 2009-2011 in the framework of the Ramsar Convention

1. RECALLING that the *Guidelines for international cooperation under the Ramsar Convention* (Resolution VII.19) provide the appropriate framework for promoting international collaboration amongst Contracting Parties and other partners;
2. ALSO RECALLING that in Resolution VIII.30 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 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 experiences 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

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 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 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 Resolution X.00 [on budgetary matters], to be allocated during the triennium 2009-2011 to regional initiatives, including 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 and 2011 through this budget line will be determined by 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 complying with 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 to conclude, where appropriate, time-based 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 approval by Standing Committee 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;

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

Annex

Operational Criteria 2009-2011 for regional initiatives in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands

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, 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 this more appropriate.
3. Because regional initiatives are intended to provide lasting, structural and operational support to facilitating and improving the implementation of all aspects of the Ramsar Convention in a defined geographical region, they depend upon receiving support by all Contracting Parties in the region concerned. Sufficient support is essential to setting up a minimal operational structure and to allow 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 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 needs to be avoided at all cost.

6. The Ramsar Secretariat has no capacity to develop, coordinate or run regional initiatives. The role of the Secretariat is to maintain regular links with the regional initiatives, to advise them, and to make sure that global Ramsar standards are applied throughout the different regions. The Secretariat needs to receive regular reports by 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 a regional initiative. Contracting Parties or other members participating in a regional initiative need to provide such services.
9. The coordinating bodies of regional initiatives are encouraged 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 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 substantive implementation capacity for the Convention in the region.

Governance of initiatives

11. Regional initiatives need to become firmly established in their geographical region. They need to establish their own governance and advisory mechanisms, involving all relevant Contracting Parties and other relevant 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 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 its objectives. Specific activities in the fields of communication, education and participatory processes with relevant stakeholders need to be included in their work plans. The outcomes of such activities need to 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 one 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.

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, 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, according to a standard format, to the Secretariat, 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 they are receiving or hope to receive Ramsar core budget funds or not.
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 by the COP to 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 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.