

Ensuring efficient delivery of scientific and technical advice and support to the Convention (Resolution XI.16)

Action requested: The Management Working Group and the Standing Committee are invited to consider the review committee's membership, Terms of Reference, mode of operations, costs, and delivery timelines for the review, and to provide clear specifications to the Secretariat for its support for the establishment of the review committee and its work.

Background

1. In Resolution XI.16 (see annex) the Contracting Parties determined to undertake “a review of the delivery, uptake and implementation of scientific and technical advice and guidance to the Convention”, and to report on its findings to the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP12, 2015).
2. From its beginnings, the Ramsar Convention has had a strong science knowledge-base at the core of its implementation, and the Resolution recognizes the important delivery by the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), over the 20 years since its establishment by COP5 in 1993, of guidance and support for the implementation of the Convention with only limited resources, and it notes that the STRP has been able to follow flexible and adaptive approaches in response to the changing needs and priorities of the Convention.
3. It is also clear, however, that with the continuing growth of the Convention and the consequently increasing needs for advice and support at regional, national and site levels, there are clear capacity limitations to the current mechanisms for responding to this demand, making it necessary to reassess the priorities and focus of current Convention mechanisms, including but not limited to the STRP.

What is the scope of the review?

4. As set out in Resolution XI.16 (paragraph 22), the scope of the review is broad, substantial and many-faceted. It will:
 - i) **review the application and utility of Ramsar guidance,**
 - building on the findings and conclusions of the “Evaluation of the Use & Utility of Ramsar Guidance”¹ and any other relevant assessments, and
 - provide recommendations for improving the operability of guidance for the target audiences;

¹ Available at http://www.ramsar.org/pdf/strp/Use_utility_Ramsar_guidance_report.pdf.

- ii) **review the full range of processes by which scientific and technical Convention implementation needs are identified, articulated, prioritised and converted into tools for the range of on-the-ground stakeholders,**
- including those processes which involve adoption of scientific and technical Resolutions by the COP (including the terms of Resolution VIII.45), as well as
 - other relevant processes within or outside formal Convention mechanisms, and also including
 - the development of clear and transparent criteria to formally prioritize STRP work in order to ensure that the tasks undertaken by the STRP reflect the highest priority needs of the Contracting Parties;
- iii) **review the roles of relevant entities within the Convention for scientific support and delivery to stakeholders,**
- including the roles of the STRP, the CEPA Oversight Panel, the Secretariat, the national focal points, and the Regional Initiatives,
 - giving special attention to finding ways to ensure that scientific and technical products effectively support the Contracting Parties' abilities to advance the implementation of the Convention;
- iv) **explore possible refinements or changes to all relevant Convention processes to facilitate effective communications** between all those entities involved in scientific support and delivery;
- v) **consider ways and means to strengthen collaboration with the scientific advisory bodies of other Multilateral Environmental Agreements on scientific and technical issues of common concern, *inter alia* through:**
- further development of joint scientific and technical products, where appropriate,
 - in order to leverage funding, increase efficiencies, and avoid duplication of efforts;
- vi) **identify monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including the use of existing mechanisms, needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the scientific support and delivery processes** within the Convention, across the various responsible entities; and
- vii) generate **suggestions for a future vision, direction and objectives for maintaining the strong practical science evidence base upon which the Ramsar Convention was founded;**

How will the review be undertaken?

5. The review will be undertaken by a “review committee”, appointed by the Standing Committee (Resolution XI.16, para. 23).
6. The Secretariat is requested to support the establishment of the review committee and its work, as needed and according to clear specifications to be provided by the Standing Committee (para. 24).
7. The review committee should consult with all relevant entities and their representatives, including *inter alia*
 - the STRP Chair and members,
 - the CEPA Oversight Panel,
 - Secretariat staff,
 - Contracting Party national focal points,
 - Ramsar Site managers,
 - other wetland managers,
 - the International Organization Partners, and
 - representatives of other bodies associated with Ramsar, such as the biodiversity-related MEAs,who can offer advice and guidance (paragraph 23. ii).
8. The review committee should engage widely with Parties (paragraph 23. iii).
9. The cost and duration of the review should be taken into consideration, and the work of the review committee should be focused and should use cost-effective means of working so as to keep its activity within reasonable limits and minimize costs (paragraph 23. iv).

Who should undertake the review, and how are they appointed?

10. Implicitly from paragraph 23, the “review committee” will be composed of:
 - members of the Management Working Group,
 - any other interested Contracting Parties, and
 - International Organization Partners “since they have been key actors of the Convention since its beginning”;
11. It is to be noted that as set out in Resolution IX.24 para. 8 (2005), the Management Working Group comprises:
 - 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;
 - 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,

so that a) “any other interested Contracting Parties” are already included in the review as members of the Management Working Group, and b) the other four IOPs are included in the review committee in addition to IOP representative already a member of the Management Working Group.

12. As noted above, Resolution XI.16 para. 23 defines the membership of the “review committee”, but that text also indicates that the members will be “appointed by the Standing Committee” –clarification may be needed, therefore, as to what the specific role of the Standing Committee itself would be for such appointments.
13. Furthermore, paragraph 23. i) states that “the review committee should, through appropriate appointments, include expertise familiar [with]:
 - the development of the Ramsar Convention,
 - the STRP,
 - the responsibilities of Contracting Parties and implementation on the ground, and also with
 - knowledge of other international science platforms, including not only IPBES but also other subsidiary scientific platforms and bodies.

It should also include:

- expertise and knowledge of the operational needs of Contracting Parties and in particular
- the needs of local wetland managers and policy makers;”

This appears to indicate that the review committee itself can make further appointments to its membership, and the role of the Standing Committee itself in any such appointments may also need clarification.

14. A third aspect of the terms of Resolution XI.16 para. 23 which may also need consideration by the Standing Committee is that the text indicates that the review will be undertaken by the Management Working Group, other Parties and the IOPs “with no conflict of interest “. Since the scope of the review covers all categories of bodies and processes involved in the Convention’s scientific and technical implementation, at global, regional, national and site levels, advice from the Standing Committee on how potential conflicts of interest will be avoided when appointments to the review committee are made, and during the conduct of the review as well, may be needed. One option may be to consider engaging, resources permitting, an independent person to lead the review under the guidance of the review committee.

What should be the outcomes of the review, and by when?

15. The objective of the review should be to present a clear assessment of the present situation and recommendations that can be submitted to the Standing Committee for consideration during the 2013-2015 triennium. Recommendations should include suggestions for mechanisms within the Convention to implement any proposed changes, with assessment of their financial implications, and a Draft Resolution for the consideration of COP12 (para. 23. iii).

What are the timelines for the completion of the review?

16. It appears that the work of the review committee should be completed by November 2014 at the latest, because with COP12 currently anticipated to take place in May/June 2015, the last meeting of the Standing Committee to which the review findings and recommendations and a Draft Resolution could be submitted is its 48th meeting will likely be held in the period December 2014/January 2015 (see Resolution XI.19). All documents for that meeting would be issued by the Secretariat one month prior to that meeting.
17. Therefore, at the present SC46 meeting, the Management Working Group and Standing Committee will need to consider the review committee's membership, Terms of Reference, mode of operation, costs and delivery timelines for the review in order for it to get underway in good time.

How will the review be funded?

18. There is no Convention core budget allocated for the conduct of the review. Resolution XI.16 (para. 23. iv) indicates that "The Chairs of the Standing Committee, its Subgroup on Finance, the Management Working Group and the STRP plus the Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee should review the STRP line items in the budget to direct their use as necessary towards implementing this Resolution". The Secretariat will provide advice on those line items for 2013 and 2014. The Standing Committee may also wish to affirm that this review overrides the responsibility of STRP Oversight Committee, as established in the STRP *modus operandi*, for approving annual allocations of STRP line item budgets.
19. Depending on the mode of operation established for the work of the review committee, and consequentially the estimated costs of the review, the Standing Committee may also wish to identify options for additional sources of funds needed.

Annex

Resolution XI.16: Ensuring efficient delivery of scientific and technical advice and support to the Convention

1. RECOGNIZING that the Ramsar Convention has been founded on a practical scientific evidence-based approach to understanding, promoting and implementing the wise use of wetlands;
2. ALSO RECOGNIZING that since its adoption in 1971, the Ramsar Convention has been able to attract the involvement and support of many organizations and individual experts who have been committed to the Convention's objectives and who continue to provide their time and expertise generously to support its implementation, thus providing a valuable resource in terms of knowledge, expertise, and capacity to support the Convention, not only at the global level but also at national and local levels;
3. NOTING that a particular strength of the Ramsar Convention is that its Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) has, since its establishment at the 5th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP5) in 1993, been able to follow flexible and adaptive approaches in response to the changing needs and priorities of the Convention;
4. FURTHER NOTING that this process has encompassed the ongoing development of the STRP's roles and composition and the evolution and refinement of the STRP's *modus operandi*, as well as the development of the range of scientific priorities addressed by the STRP and other bodies of the Convention over the years, {as reflected in the work themes and priorities set out in the annexes to Resolution XI.17 on *Future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention for 2013-2015*};
5. WELCOMING the continuing increase in the numbers of Contracting Parties and Ramsar Sites over the years, but RECOGNIZING that this growth is leading to an increased demand for scientific and technical support for implementation and interventions, including increased demand for Ramsar Advisory Missions, and that there are clear capacity limitations to the current mechanisms for responding to this demand, making it necessary to reassess the priorities and focus of current Convention mechanisms, including but not limited to the STRP;
6. ALSO RECOGNIZING that the Convention should continue to work to improve its understanding of, and response to, the scientific and technical needs related to wetlands of Contracting Parties, in the most efficient and effective way possible;
7. NOTING that a number of different mechanisms for delivering scientific and technical knowledge, advice and support are currently utilized to further Convention implementation, including *inter alia* through the Secretariat, the International Organization Partners (IOPs), Ramsar Regional Initiatives, Ramsar Advisory Missions, and the STRP;
8. RECALLING that in the review of the utility of Ramsar guidance ("An Evaluation of the Use & Utility of Ramsar Guidance" and COP10 DOC.21), it was reported that, whilst the Ramsar guidance and the Wise Use Handbooks are generally appreciated and found useful by many people and Contracting Parties, there are opportunities for significant

- improvements in the delivery, uptake and implementation of scientific and technical guidance;
9. RECOGNIZING that there are several distinct target audiences for scientific and technical advice, support and information, due to the range of implementing agents who play roles in achieving the wise use of wetlands, including *inter alia* managers of individual wetland sites as well as managers of networks of wetlands such as on migratory waterbird flyways; wetland policy makers and those responsible for regulating use of and impacts on wetlands; policy makers in other sectors such as water, agriculture, health, urban development, and energy; stakeholders and local communities who may depend upon wetlands and wetland ecosystem services; educators and researchers; and private sector organizations;
 10. AWARE that these diverse target audiences require scientific and technical advice, support and information at differing scales relevant to their responsibilities or interests, including at local or wetland site scale, river basin scale, and national, regional and global scales;
 11. RECOGNIZING that there are many wetland site managers and local communities among others who require practical information and advice, case studies of best practices, and training for the wise use of wetlands, but who may lack the resources or the networks through which to access such information and training, and may not be able to access fully the advice and guidance prepared by the STRP;
 12. ALSO RECOGNIZING that the capacity of the STRP is limited and cannot address the needs of so many target audiences on so many subjects and, therefore, that priorities should be established in terms both of targets and of subjects;
 13. AWARE that Ramsar's profile and recognition are growing in international processes related to water, energy, climate change, and other related sectors, and that this implies an increasing need for wetland managers and policy-makers to be able to provide relevant, credible scientific information and advice on wetlands to these processes;
 14. ALSO AWARE that, through the STRP and the Secretariat, the Ramsar Convention has contributed much scientific knowledge and information on wetlands to other international biodiversity processes, notably the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) and its 2005 synthesis report on water and wetlands (*Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Wetlands and Water Synthesis*), and has been active in support and collaboration with the scientific advisory bodies of other Multilateral Environmental Agreements;
 15. REITERATING that all bodies of the Convention, including the Contracting Parties, the Secretariat, the STRP, the Conference of Parties, and the Standing Committee, and others such as National Ramsar Committees, 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, and EMPHASIZING the importance of clarifying these roles and ensuring effective coordination and communication in working to deliver scientific and technical support to enhance the implementation of the Convention;
 16. AWARE that the effective delivery and uptake of scientific advice, support and information, at the appropriate scales and to the appropriate target audience, is 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;

17. AWARE of the potential for the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) to strengthen the scientific basis for effective action related to the Ramsar Convention (Resolution XI.6);
18. RECOGNIZING the need to establish clear processes for identifying and communicating scientific and technical priorities of the Parties for supporting Convention implementation at targeted and appropriate level, and to consider current priorities as well as future or emerging priorities which should be addressed by the STRP and other bodies of the Convention, as appropriate; and
19. RECALLING Decisions SC42-23 and SC43-12 of the Standing Committee regarding the establishment of an informal working group to take these matters forward to COP11, and WELCOMING this opportunity to reflect upon and improve the Convention's scientific functions;

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20. EXPRESSES APPRECIATION to the informal working group established by the Standing Committee for its provision of the supporting information paper to this Resolution (COP11 DOC.26);
21. AGREES that a review of the delivery, uptake and implementation of scientific and technical advice and guidance to the Convention will be undertaken for consideration by the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP12);
22. ALSO AGREES that the review committee will, *inter alia*:
 - i) review the application and utility of Ramsar guidance, building on the findings and conclusions of the "Evaluation of the Use & Utility of Ramsar Guidance" and any other relevant assessments, and provide recommendations for improving the operationality of guidance for the target audiences;
 - ii) review the full range of processes by which scientific and technical Convention implementation needs are identified, articulated, prioritised and converted into tools for the range of on-the-ground stakeholders, including those processes which involve adoption of scientific and technical Resolutions by the COP (including the terms of Resolution VIII.45) as well as other relevant processes within or outside formal Convention mechanisms, and also including the development of clear and transparent criteria to formally prioritize STRP work in order to ensure that the tasks undertaken by the STRP reflect the highest priority needs of the Contracting Parties;
 - iii) review the roles of relevant entities within the Convention for scientific support and delivery to stakeholders, including the roles of the STRP, the CEPA Oversight Panel, the Secretariat, the national focal points, and the Regional Initiatives, giving special attention to finding ways to ensure that scientific and technical products

effectively support the Contracting Parties' abilities to advance the implementation of the Convention;

- iv) explore possible refinements or changes to all relevant Convention processes to facilitate effective communications between all those entities involved in scientific support and delivery;
 - v) consider ways and means to strengthen collaboration with the scientific advisory bodies of other Multilateral Environmental Agreements on scientific and technical issues of common concern, *inter alia* through further development of joint scientific and technical products, where appropriate, in order to leverage funding, increase efficiencies, and avoid duplication of efforts;
 - vi) identify monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including the use of existing mechanisms, needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the scientific support and delivery processes within the Convention, across the various responsible entities; and
 - vii) generate suggestions for a future vision, direction and objectives for maintaining the strong practical science evidence base upon which the Ramsar Convention was founded;
23. FURTHER AGREES that the review will be undertaken by members of the Management Working Group and any other interested Contracting Parties and International Organization Partners since they have been key actors of the Convention since its beginning, with no conflict of interest and appointed by the Standing Committee, and that:
- i) the review committee should, through appropriate appointments, include expertise familiar of the development of the Ramsar Convention, the STRP, the responsibilities of Contracting Parties, and implementation on the ground, and also with knowledge of other international science platforms including not only IPBES but also other subsidiary scientific platforms and bodies. It should also include expertise and knowledge of the operational needs of Contracting Parties and in particular the needs of local wetland managers and policy makers;
 - ii) the review committee should consult with all relevant entities and their representatives, including *inter alia* the STRP Chair and members, CEPA Oversight Panel, Secretariat staff, Contracting Party national focal points, Ramsar Site managers, other wetland managers, International Organization Partners, and representatives of other bodies associated with Ramsar, such as the biodiversity-related MEAs, who can offer advice and guidance;
 - iii) the review committee should engage widely with Parties and should present a clear assessment of the present situation and recommendations that will be submitted to the Standing Committee for consideration during the 2013-2015 triennium. Recommendations will include suggestions for mechanisms within the Convention to implement any proposed changes, with assessment of their financial implications, and a Draft Resolution for COP12 consideration; and
 - iv) the cost and duration of the review should be taken into consideration, and the work of the review committee should be focused and should use cost-effective means of

working so as to keep its activity within reasonable limits and minimize costs. The Chairs of the Standing Committee, its Subgroup on Finance, the Management Working Group and the STRP plus the Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee should review the STRP line items in the budget to direct their use as necessary towards implementing this Resolution; and

24. REQUESTS the Secretariat to support the establishment of the review committee and its work, as needed and according to clear specifications to be provided by the Standing Committee.