

GENERIC HOSTING AGREEMENT FOR A RAMSAR STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING

Introduction

Meetings of the Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention (SC meetings) usually take place at the Secretariat Headquarters in Gland, Switzerland (except for those meetings held immediately before or after a meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP)). However, at Ramsar COP10, the Parties “urged Contracting Parties to consider hosting meetings of the Standing Committee, resources permitting”.

The 40th meeting of the Standing Committee reconsidered the practicalities of Contracting Parties making proposals to host SC meetings, (Decision SC40-38). The Standing Committee:

- “i) requested that the Secretariat prepare and issue generic guidance to all Parties concerning the process, timelines, host country responsibilities, and indicative costs of offering to host a Standing Committee meeting, as the basis for their consideration of making any such offer;
- ii) directed any country making an offer to host an SC meeting to provide clear information on the matters in i) above to the Secretariat and Standing Committee at the time of making the offer;”

The following guidelines have thus been prepared to assist potential host countries.

SC meetings are usually held once a year, sometimes twice during a COP year (as well as at the COP location immediately before and after the conference). **Regular SC meetings** are currently attended by 80-90 participants and 20 Ramsar Secretariat staff, making a total of 100-110 participants. Participants are SC members, many of whose attendance is sponsored by the Secretariat, representatives of the International Organization Partners (IOPs), observer Contracting Parties (often represented by their Geneva Missions), Ramsar staff and others.

SC meetings are complex affairs including plenary sessions, regional meetings, several subgroup and ad hoc meetings of working groups, some of which run concurrently. Interpretation in the three working languages of the Convention is required for plenary sessions. The meetings thus require solid logistical and technical backup.

A Contracting Party wishing to host a Standing Committee meeting should provide a written proposal to be presented at the regular Standing Committee meeting prior to the

one they propose to host, i.e. usually one year before the planned invitation. This proposal should reach the Convention Secretariat at least two months in advance of the SC meeting at which it will be presented, in order for it to be included with other documents for that meeting. The proposal should include the information detailed below.

Following acceptance of an offer, the host country and Secretariat will formalize arrangements by way of a detailed MOU. An illustrative template of such also follows.

HOSTING PROPOSAL - to be submitted to Standing Committee for approval

- 1) The complete proposal should reach the Secretariat, the Chair and Vice Chair of Standing Committee, and the Chair of the Finance Subgroup, no later than two months before the Standing Committee meeting to which the proposal will be submitted. This is to ensure that the proposal can be analyzed and clarification requested where necessary, and then submitted to Standing Committee within the deadline for SC documents.
- 2) The proposal should contain the following information as a minimum:
 - a) The name and contact details of the Coordinator and the proposed composition of the Task Force. The Coordinator and the Task Force should be ready to start work on the MOU immediately after approval of the proposal and should ideally be involved in the preparation of the proposal.
 - b) A commitment to ensuring effective and regular communication with the Ramsar Secretariat during the whole process.
 - c) A commitment to ensuring the delivery of all logistical matters and equipment requirements as spelled out in the template MOU.
 - d) A commitment to cover all meeting costs additional to those funded by the Convention core budget. A budget and a plan on how the money will be disbursed and when it will be paid will be attached to the MoU, but should ideally be available in draft form and attached to the proposal. It is essential that the host country has a clear understanding of all meeting costs, and the Secretariat's Finance Officer is available to discuss these.
 - e) Details of the proposed meeting venue: name, location, access (from airport, nearest city), plan of the meeting facilities, including seating capacity of meeting rooms (classroom style), and outline of services and equipments available, in English.

- f) Details of facilities of proposed hotel(s) (number of rooms available, distance from the meeting venue if relevant, category of accommodation, price ranges).
- g) Brief information on the city and region where the meeting will take place (climate at the proposed time of the meeting, wetlands/Ramsar sites in the vicinity and possibly other tourist attractions).
- h) Should it be relevant, the host country should provide an update of any current security issues.
- i) A commitment that local staff will be available for preparations before and at the meeting. It is expected that local staff who will be in contact with the participants will at a minimum speak English, but that some may also speak French and Spanish if possible.
- j) Visas: The proposal should contain a list of countries whose nationals need a visa to enter the host country, and a list of the host country's embassies and consulates. It should also contain a commitment from the host country (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and/or any other Ministry involved in the delivery of visas) that visa delivery will be facilitated for all participants at the SC meeting, with an outline of how participants from countries where there is no national embassy/consular service will obtain their visa.
- k) Transport: The host country should outline its plan to transport participants from the nearest international airport to the meeting venue, free of charge. If the meeting venue is difficult to reach, for instance because there is no major international airport nearby, or for other reasons, the host country should demonstrate awareness of these difficulties and present an outline plan on how to solve them.

Template MOU - Tasks and obligations of the Host Country and of the Ramsar Convention Secretariat with regard to hosting, organizing and running a Meeting of Standing Committee

Responsibilities of the host country:

- 1) **Designate a Task Force and a Coordinator:** The national Ramsar Authority needs to establish a Task Force to work with the Ramsar Secretariat to plan and carry out the necessary preparations as well as the actual running of the meeting. A Coordinator should be appointed and be available to start work immediately after the proposal has been accepted by the Standing Committee, to formalize arrangements with the Ramsar Secretariat. Ideally, the Coordinator will be involved in the preparation of the proposal. This person should be easy to contact by phone and e-mail and fluent in English.
- 2) **Identify a venue for the meeting** with adequate meeting facilities and hotels (see item 7 below).
- 3) **Secure financial resources.** Funding needs and sources will need to be identified, and responsibilities for funding clarified. The host Government will undertake, when signing the MoU, to cover all additional costs which are not covered by the Secretariat core allocation for the Standing Committee meeting.
- 4) **Local staff:** The host country will provide support staff to handle local preparations and coordination with the Secretariat in advance of the meeting, and on-site during the meeting, in sufficient number to help and support the participants, including technical support for all computer and audio-visual equipment used during the meeting, operation of the photocopying services to produce meeting papers and documents mentioned under item 5 below, and liaison with hotel management and other local services. Local staff is also expected to handle accommodation arrangements, local information to participants, and welcoming and help for participants upon registration on the first day(s) of the meeting.

N.B. It is important to note that while a number of participants speak English, some participants speak only other Convention languages (French or Spanish), and that they will need assistance in these languages upon arrival, at registration, and during the meeting. While the Secretariat will handle matters related to the meeting itself, the host country should be ready to provide assistance upon arrival in the country, for transfers, and for everyday matters such as excursions, changing money, etc.

The host country will provide a staffing plan - staff who will be involved in the meeting (government staff, hotel staff, technicians, etc.)

- 5) **Send personalized official invitations** to all Standing Committee members and permanent observers and, upon request, to observers who wish to attend the meeting, **for the purpose of facilitating visas**. The Secretariat can provide examples of invitation letters.

See also paragraph 20) below: the Secretariat notifies Contracting Parties at least three months in advance of the date and agenda of the meeting. The Secretariat sends a note via diplomatic channels, with a copy to the national administrative authority. The personalized invitations that the host will send for facilitating visas should be sent immediately after or very shortly after the Secretariat has sent the invitation via diplomatic channels.

- 6) **Information for participants:** information about the meeting venue and area, visas, transportation options, hotels, the climate, opportunities for pre- and post-SC excursions should be made available on the host ministry Web site, or provided to the Secretariat for the Ramsar Web site, at least three months before the meeting, in coordination with the Secretariat sending the invitation. The Secretariat can provide examples of this kind of information.
- 7) **Provide adequate meeting and office facilities: Providing meeting rooms for five or six working days, according to the agreed schedule (depending on the timing of a possible excursion, the premises may have to be rented for six working days).**

Offices and computers/printers/photocopiers/phones/ need to be available one full day before the start of the meetings; however, a small team (two to three Secretariat staff) will need access to working space two days before the start of the meeting.

- a) **A plenary room, seating up to 100 people at tables**
 - i) **With interpretation facilities into 3 languages** (3 booths) - English, French, Spanish,
 - ii) With 50 table microphones and 2 cordless microphones, and
 - iii) 100 receivers and matching earphones (clean sets to be available every day);
 - iv) Facility to record the plenary debates, and
 - v) Technical support throughout the meeting.

- vi) N.B. During the first day of meetings (working groups), only the microphones and earphones will be used. Interpretation is provided only for plenary meetings, i.e. for the last three days. Therefore, the booths and related equipment will be used only for the last three days of the meeting.
 - vii) Full projection facilities (computer, beamer, and screen), and
 - viii) One large screen, or several small screens as necessary, to allow the officials on the head table to see PowerPoint and other presentations without leaving their seats;
 - ix) Internet access (individual power sockets (at a minimum one for 2 participants), WiFi).
 - x) Technician(s) available at all times during the meeting to operate and help with any problem with the interpretation and projection facilities.
- b) **Two (2) rooms for meetings** of smaller groups (including regional meetings and ad hoc meetings), seating up to 20 people at tables, with Internet access (individual power sockets, WiFi) and projection facilities (computer, beamer, screen).
- c) N.B. regional meetings (4 groups) take place in the mornings before plenary. It is expected that these groups could use these two smaller rooms, the plenary room and another room or meeting space only for the early morning period on the three days of plenary meeting.
- d) **Office space for 20 Ramsar Secretariat staff**, with three separate offices with meeting space to be used as necessary by the Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General, SC Chair, Rapporteur, or other official meetings.
- i) These offices need to have Internet access, some desktop computers (detailed numbers will be provided and discussed at a later stage), printers (one or two depending on the location of the offices), a photocopier, one landline telephone with international access, a fax machine and facilities to link laptop computers of Ramsar Secretariat staff to printers and photocopiers.
 - ii) Software: the equipment provided should be compatible with the software and equipment used by the Secretariat. Software in English should be provided on all computers and other machines (printers, photocopiers, fax, telephones) provided for the meeting.
- 8) **Documentation:** the host country will provide free of charge a large capacity, high-speed photocopier, with staff to operate it and technical support on call, as well as

enough paper and cartridges to make copies of documents during the meeting. In addition, the host country will have available at the start of the meeting a dozen sets of SC41 documents for those participants unable to bring their own documents.

- 9) **Provide accommodation and catering** facilities of international hotel standard for up to 110 people. N.B. It is important to note that participants come from many different cultures and backgrounds and that varied options for meals must be available (e.g., Halal, Kosher, vegetarian).
- 10) **The host country will be in charge of receiving and handling all hotel bookings**, including last minute changes and changes during the meeting.
- 11) **Transfers and transport:** the host country will be responsible for providing information on international and national flights to reach the airport nearest to the venue. It will also be in charge of transferring participants free of charge from and to the nearest international or important national airport to the hotel/conference venue, and of any other transport of participants necessary during the meeting (for instance if participants stay at hotels away from the conference venue).
- 12) **Hospitality:** It is expected that the host government
 - a) will host a welcome reception and/or an SC dinner; and
 - b) the host country will provide continuous tea, coffee, and water service for participants during meeting hours, in the meeting room or just outside. During the meeting, there are no coffee breaks; participants take refreshments as they please. Coffee, tea, water and possibly some biscuits are provided free of charge.
- 13) **Visa facilitation:** The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and/or any other relevant Ministry needs to facilitate the speedy delivery of visas to Standing Committee members and observers to enter the host country, as well as to Ramsar Secretariat staff participating in the Meeting. The host country will designate a staff member in charge of assisting participants with obtaining their visa.
- 14) Facilitating the opening of a bank account locally for the Ramsar Secretariat, for handling Secretariat payments at the venue.
- 15) Other facilities for participants: an area with 4 computers and a printer and internet access where participants can access their e-mails and/or work.
- 16) Medical assistance: be prepared, in case of need, to help participants get medical assistance and/or medicines.

- 17) Banking facilities/ATM at the venue or very close by. Information on the use of credit cards.
- 18) Coverage of all **additional costs**, compared with costs incurred by the Ramsar Secretariat of holding a Standing Committee meeting in Gland.
 - a) This includes possible **additional costs for sponsored Standing Committee and Management Working Group members** (currently one person from Cameroon, Georgia, Mauritius, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, China, Lebanon, Thailand, Croatia, Jamaica, Panama, Paraguay, Mexico, Marshall Islands) compared to their costs of travel to and subsistence in Switzerland.
 - b) Full costs of travel, accommodation and subsistence for **Ramsar Secretariat staff** needed to travel to the host country to participate in the Meeting (20 staff members).
 - c) Cost of a preliminary visit by two Ramsar Secretariat staff.
 - d) Costs of using/hiring the **meeting facilities** as mentioned above (item 5.), plus **coffee breaks, and local transport**.
 - e) **Incremental costs of bringing Ramsar's team of professional interpreters** to the host country.
 - f) **Interpretation equipment** can be sourced locally and its set-up and use must be supported by experienced on-site staff. Alternatively, these services can be sourced from the Secretariat's usual suppliers, but the additional cost will be met by the host country. (In this case, the Secretariat needs to be informed at the latest three to four months before the meeting.)
 - g) Costs of shipping documents/stationary required for the meeting.
 - h) If possible, funding for Contracting Party observers.

The Ramsar Secretariat will inform the host Government about the normal costs of items a) to g) above in Switzerland and work with the host Government to estimate all additional/alternative costs.

- 19) **Convention outreach** to the authorities at national and regional/local level and the general public in the host country. A major advantage for holding Standing Committee Meetings outside of the Secretariat offices is to use this opportunity to

communicate throughout the host country about the aims and approaches of the Convention. This needs to be done via the mass media, public and cultural events, and possible visits to nearby Ramsar sites or other important wetland ecosystems in conjunction with the Standing Committee Meeting.

The host country is expected to establish a plan of communication and outreach activities and to implement it with the help of a variety of public and private partners before, during and after the Meeting, in order to make best use of this international meeting in the country.

Responsibilities of the Ramsar Secretariat

Organization of the overall meeting and the meetings of sub-groups and special committees as appropriate, including day to day communication with SC members before the meeting to ensure that agenda and substantial matters are adequately prepared. Liaison with Task Force and local staff re. logistics.

Invitations and pre-registration

- 20) The Secretariat will send invitations by diplomatic channels to the Contracting Parties and permanent observers and will pre-register participants. As required by Resolution VII.1, the Ramsar Secretariat notifies Contracting Parties by diplomatic channels at least three (3) months before the meeting.

Documentation

- 21) Preparation of all required meeting documents for submission within established deadlines (documents must be available at least one month before the meeting).
- 22) Preparation and distribution of updated and new documents during the meeting.
- 23) Preparation and distribution of the Standing Committee meeting report (immediately after the meeting).

Arrangements for sponsored delegates/Secretariat staff

- 24) Organize flights for sponsored delegates, interpreters, and Secretariat staff (as soon as invitations have been issued).

- 25) Liaise with local person/agency in charge of hotel bookings with regard to sponsored delegates, interpreters, and Secretariat staff hotel bookings (provide dates of stay as soon as travel details are confirmed).
- 26) Payment of accommodation and per diem for sponsored delegates and Secretariat Staff (prepare detail of payment needed; transfer money in advance of the meeting; at the meeting, payment of per diem to sponsored delegates).

Secretariat services

- 27) Registration of participants; drafting of agenda and programme; contacts with Standing Committee and Executive Team; preparation of documents; e-mailing and posting of documents on the Internet).
- 28) Organization of the secretariat of the meeting, including contracting simultaneous interpretation (see 18.e above) and provision of secretariat services during meeting, under the authority of the Secretary General of the Convention. (Also includes: handling of registration desk at the meeting, provision of badges and name plates (see below – in collaboration with host country), assistance to head table and rapporteur during the meeting, assistance to sponsored delegates with regard to their flights, provision of rapporteur and secretariat services).

Name plates and badges

- 29) The Secretariat will prepare the data for country and organizations name plates and badges. (How these are printed and last minute badges and name plates produced needs to be discussed with the host.)

Annexes: Outline of a typical SC meeting programme
 Requirements for interpretation booths

RAMSAR STANDING COMMITTEE MEETINGS SUGGESTED STRUCTURE OF A MEETING

Standing Committee meetings usually start with two to three half-day subgroup meetings (i.e. one to one and half days), then continue with two and a half to three full days of plenary sessions.

Usually, not all members participate in the subgroup meetings, which means that arrivals are staggered.

If an excursion is proposed (full or half day), it is suggested to schedule it just before the full plenary meeting, so that all participants can plan to arrive in time and take part in the trip.

Example:

Arrival: Day 0 or morning of day 1

Day 1 p.m. and day 2: Subgroup meetings

Day 3: Excursion

Day 4, 5, and 6 SC meeting in plenary (close of the meeting at 1 p.m. on day 6 or full day's work as necessary)

Return travel: afternoon of day 6 or day 7