

Urgent challenges to the wise use of wetlands to receive enhanced attention: Update on wetland inventories

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. note the progress of Contracting Parties in completing national wetland inventories and the lessons learned; and
- ii. note next steps in the support provided by the Secretariat to Contracting Parties on the completion of national wetland inventories.

Background

1. As early as the first meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP1, Cagliari, 1980), Contracting Parties recognized that national wetland policies should be based on a nationwide inventory of wetlands and of their resources (Recommendation 1.5). Subsequent COP decisions have regularly reiterated the importance of national wetland inventories (NWIs) for policy and decision making to the conservation and effective management of all wetlands, to the designation of Wetlands of International Importance, to the development or updating of climate change strategies and plans including nationally determined contributions (NDCs), and to the achievement and tracking of many of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to contribute to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the aims of the Global Biodiversity Framework.
2. Since the Convention's first Strategic Plan, for the 1997-2002 period, Contracting Parties have established as a priority area of focus improving compliance with the Convention provisions on inventories of all wetlands. This is highlighted in the fourth Strategic Plan for 2016-2024 through Target 8 "National wetland inventories have been initiated, completed or updated and disseminated and used for promoting the conservation and effective management of all wetlands", under Goal 3 "Wisely using all wetlands".
3. As noted in Resolution XIV.6 on *Enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions*, the Interagency Expert Group on SDGs in 2017 appointed the Convention as co-custodian of Indicator 6.6.1 "Change in the extent of water-related ecosystems over time", using data from the Convention's National Reports, which used as a main source wetland inventories based on the Convention's definitions and requirements for reporting. Through this mechanism, national validated data using accepted international definitions of wetlands is provided to measure the extent of water-related ecosystems under SDG 6.

4. Paragraph 49 of Resolution XIV.6 encourages Contracting Parties to strengthen their efforts to complete their NWIs and to report on wetland extent as a contribution to SDG Indicator 6.6.1, and requests the Secretariat to continue working with Contracting Parties to actively support these efforts.
5. In response to Resolution XIII.4 on *Responsibilities, roles and composition of the Standing Committee and regional categorization of countries under the Convention*, the Secretariat presented to the 57th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC57), in document SC57.Doc 8, a list of urgent challenges to the wise use of wetlands within the scope of the fourth Strategic Plan that should receive enhanced attention during the 2019-2021 triennium, and which could inform various strategic areas of work of the Standing Committee and actions to positively impact the conservation and wise use of wetlands. The Standing Committee, in Decision SC57-53, decided to prioritize the topic of inventories for the 2019-2021 triennium, in order to allow Contracting Parties to focus on measures to address this urgent challenge, given that information on wetland inventories is limited and that more complete inventories are fundamental for monitoring progress against SDGs.
6. The Standing Committee at SC54 and SC57, through Decisions SC54-26 and SC57-47, approved the allocation of funds to support Contracting Parties in the completion of wetland inventories.
7. The Secretariat prepared documents SC58 Doc.9 on *Urgent challenges to the wise use of wetlands to receive enhanced attention: Best practices in the development of wetland inventories* and SC59 Doc.9 on *Update in the development of wetland inventories*, which outlined the progress of Contracting Parties in completing NWIs and the support provided by the Secretariat.
8. The present report presents the progress of Contracting Parties in completing NWIs and the progress and next steps in the support provided by the Secretariat to Contracting Parties on the completion of NWIs.

Progress of Contracting Parties in completing national wetland inventories

9. As indicated in COP14 Doc.9.1 *Report of the Secretary General on the implementation of the Convention: Global implementation* which was presented to COP14, progress in completing NWIs has been limited. 46% of Contracting Parties reporting to COP14 had completed an NWI. This finding was very similar to those for COP13 (44%) and COP12 (47%). Across the Convention's six regions, there is no clear pattern in terms of progress in completing NWIs. 52% of the Parties provided data on wetland extent (SDG Indicator 6.6.1) for COP14.
10. The Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) at its 25th meeting¹ noted: that development of NWIs is progressing slowly and is geographically uneven; that global wetland inventory is patchy and almost entirely absent for some wetland types; and that Ramsar Information Sheets (RISs) for many Wetlands of International Importance are out of date, and Site boundaries are missing for many Sites. These issues limit the use of such critical information in reporting on implementation of the Convention, reporting on SDG indicator 6.6.1, and are impediments to establishing a baseline for reporting on wetlands in relation to targets under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

¹ See <https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc62-doc19-report-of-the-chair-of-the-scientific-and-technical-review-panel-including-draft>.

11. Among the findings of the 2018 and 2021 editions of the Global Wetland Outlook is the importance of updating and improving wetland inventories to help countries to prioritize wetlands for restoration and to rationally allocate management. Improved wetland inventory will also support future wetland assessments and outlooks.
12. Limitations in national wetland inventory is likely to constrain monitoring and assessment of wetland status to inform the necessary actions by governments and other actors at all levels to conserve, restore and wisely use wetlands. It is also likely to limit effective integration of wetland actions in national strategies and plans for biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development, and so limit synergistic delivery on commitments under the Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Work of the Secretariat to support national wetland inventory

13. Based on the data submitted and Decision SC57-47 on wetland inventories, the Secretariat has continued to support Contracting Parties in developing wetland inventories and completing and refining the data on wetland extent that is available in inventories or similar country assessments, but has not been reported by Parties. Refinement of the data includes reporting on wetland type using the three main categories in the Ramsar classification: inland, marine and coastal, and human-made wetlands.
14. In documents SC58 Doc.9 and SC59 Doc.9, the Secretariat reported on the findings of the gap analysis² commissioned by the Secretariat in 2019, which identifies the current barriers, limitations and challenges facing Contracting Parties in undertaking, refining or completing wetland inventories and reporting on wetland extent, and the priorities (including funding) to overcome the challenges; and it identified steps to continue supporting Contracting Parties. Voluntary contributions towards the Secretariat's work in support of the development of NWIs has been provided by the Flemish Ministry for Justice and Enforcement, Environment and Spatial Development, Energy and Tourism, with a focus on supporting African Contracting Parties, as well as the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment.
15. Further to this, and in light of the current status of development of NWIs, the Secretariat recommends a more structured approach towards wetland inventory support. This would entail:
 - a. Further identification of specific needs or key constraints which Contracting Parties face in wetland inventory, building on the assessment done in 2019 and in consultation with Parties.
 - b. Development of additional guidance addressing aspects that may not be sufficiently covered in existing guidance material (such as those relating to institutional arrangements and policy basis for wetland inventory), where relevant with the STRP and in the context of its work plan.
 - c. Capacity building, including the preparation of training courses as well as training materials for wetland inventory, again with attention to specific topics (such as integration of Earth Observation data in NWI) and specific applications of NWI called for in COP Resolutions

² See <https://www.ramsar.org/document/gap-analysis-to-undertake-refine-or-complete-wetland-inventories-executive-summary>.

(such as use of NWI for wetland actions in climate change plans), as well as on-site demonstration projects.

- d. Implementation support, including development of institutional partnerships (for example, in relation to preparation of guidance and capacity, as well as partnerships with the Global Earth Observation (GEO) community for global wetland inventory).
 - e. Resource mobilization to enable further and expanded support to strengthen the capacities of Parties to undertake, complete or update NWIs. This may encompass financial support for work on NWIs overall, as well as funding targeted at individual elements identified above.
16. The Secretariat will update the Standing Committee at SC63 and SC64 on progress made during the triennium.