

## Report of the Secretariat on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives

### Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. take note of the annual reports submitted by the Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) for 2023 in accordance with Resolution XIV.7 *on Ramsar Regional Initiatives*;
- ii. consider the proposal for a new Ramsar Regional Initiative, the Danube WILDIsland initiative, within the framework of the Convention in accordance with Paragraph 27 of Resolution XIV.7; and
- iii. note the allocation of funds from the 2024 Ramsar core budget line D “Support to Regional Initiatives” proposed in document SC63 Doc.9.1, to provide start-up funding to a newly established Initiative for its activities in 2024, as follows:
  - CHF 29,000 to the newly proposed Danube WILDIsland RRI, pending approval by the Standing Committee.

### Background

1. At its 14th meeting (COP14, 2022), in paragraph 1 of Resolution XIV.7 Part A *on Ramsar Regional Initiatives*, the Conference of the Contracting Parties recalled that Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) “which include regional centres for training and capacity building and regional networks to facilitate cooperation, are intended as an operational means to provide effective support for improved implementation of the Convention in specific geographic regions, through voluntary international cooperation on wetland-related issues of common concern”.
2. Based on Resolution XIV.7 Part B and Decision SC62-22 of the Standing Committee, the following 21 RRIs are operating in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands until COP15:

Four Ramsar regional centres for training and capacity building:

- Ramsar Centre for Eastern Africa (RAMCEA)
- Ramsar Regional Centre for Training and Research in the Western Hemisphere (CREHO)
- Ramsar Regional Center in Central and West Asia (RRC-CWA)
- Ramsar Regional Center – East Asia (RRC-EA); and

Seventeen Ramsar networks for regional cooperation:

- Ramsar Regional Initiative for West African Coastal Zone Wetlands (WACoWet)

- Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Niger River Basin (NigerWet)
- Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Senegal River Basin (SenegalWet)
- Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of High Andean Wetlands
- Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of the Plata River Basin
- Caribbean Wetlands Ramsar Regional Initiative (CariWet)
- Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of Mangroves and Coral Reefs
- Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Amazon River Basin
- East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership
- Ramsar Regional Initiative for Central Asia
- Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative
- Mediterranean Wetlands Ramsar Regional Initiative (MedWet)
- Carpathian Wetland Ramsar Regional Initiative (CWI)
- Nordic-Baltic Wetlands Ramsar Regional Initiative (NorBalWet)
- Ramsar Regional Initiative on Black and Azov Seas Coastal Wetlands (BlackSeaWet)
- Southern African Ramsar Regional Initiative (SARRI)
- International Mangrove Centre (IMC)

### **Progress by the 21 Ramsar Regional Initiatives in 2023**

3. Through the *Operational Guidelines for Ramsar Regional Initiatives to support the implementation of the Convention* in the Annex of Resolution XIV.7, RRI are requested to submit to the Standing Committee, through the Secretariat, annual financial and progress reports regarding the implementation of their workplan, using the format in Annex 3 of the same Resolution. Contracting Parties also instruct the Secretariat in paragraph 14 of the same Resolution to “provide the COP and Standing Committee a summary of the information obtained from the annual reports to assist these bodies in their reviews of RRI and decisions regarding funding”.
4. The coordinators of RRI were requested to submit the report of progress of work in 2023 and planned work for 2024, including a financial overview, to the Secretariat by 19 January 2024. These reports are available here: [https://www.ramsar.org/search?sort\\_bef\\_combine=search\\_api\\_relevance\\_DESC&f\[\]=bodies\\_and\\_events%3A2723&f\[\]=document\\_type%3A2908&f\[\]=search\\_date%3A2024](https://www.ramsar.org/search?sort_bef_combine=search_api_relevance_DESC&f[]=bodies_and_events%3A2723&f[]=document_type%3A2908&f[]=search_date%3A2024).
5. The Secretariat sent reminders to the RRI coordinators, requesting them to submit annual reports, and followed up bilaterally with each of them. Annual reports were received from 17 RRI. The following RRI did not submit annual reports within the required deadlines:
  - Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of High Andean Wetlands (HAW);
  - Caribbean Wetlands Ramsar Regional Initiative (CariWet);
  - Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of Mangroves and Coral Reefs (Mangrove & Coral Reefs); and
  - Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Senegal River Basin (SenegalWet).
6. The failure by RRI to submit annual reports in 2024 continued from previous years. Table 1 below indicates RRI that have not submitted a report in each of the last five years.

Table 1: Ramsar Regional Initiatives that have not submitted a report, 2020-2024

Reporting period	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
BlackSeaWet				X	
CariWet					X
CREHO	X		X		
High Andean Wetlands		X	X		X
Mangrove & Coral Reefs					X
SenegalWet			X	X	X
WACoWet			X	X	

7. SenegalWet has failed to submit a report for three continuous years, and has not done so since the reporting period of 2021-2022, after it received the first tranche of funding from the Convention allocated from the core budget in 2021. For this reason, the Secretariat has not disbursed the final tranche of funding.
8. RRI are encouraged to submit their annual reports in the next reporting cycle in line with subparagraph 12.e) of Resolution XIV.7.
9. The Secretariat reviewed the annual reports submitted by 17 RRI and prepared a summary based on their ongoing activities. Annex 1 of the present document presents an overview of the reports submitted.
10. According to the reports, most RRI play an important role in bringing the member Contracting Parties together to promote regional cooperation:
  - Most RRI have held at least one coordination meeting during the year.
  - Most RRI organized or supported CEPA activities in the region, including World Wetlands Day celebrations.
  - A few RRI conducted regional policy studies or assessments on thematic areas, including climate change, invasive species, and Ramsar Site management.
  - Most RRI have engaged in fundraising activities such as writing funding proposals or establishing sustainable financing platforms.
11. The total annual expenditure of RRI in 2023 was an estimated CHF 3.2 million. This was an increase from CHF 2.7 million in 2022.<sup>1</sup> However, the increase was mostly due to the budgeted expenditure of the newly endorsed IMC (CHF 1.9 million in 2023) and the expenditure of other RRI fell overall, most notably that of MedWet.
12. Commonly recognized challenges identified from the reports were limited financial resources and lack of coordination due to a rotating coordination scheme.
13. The Secretariat has been promoting more opportunities for RRI to communicate and learn from each other. It organized the second virtual annual planning meeting of RRI on 25 January 2024, providing an opportunity for RRI to share their annual plans and identify possible areas of cooperation. This year's thematic discussion was on capacity building.

<sup>1</sup> Based on annual actual expenditure reported by RRI (for those reported in a currency other than CHF, the annual average exchange rate for 2022 was applied).

## Proposals for new RRIs

14. Paragraph 27 of Resolution XIV.7 instructs the Secretariat to open calls for proposals for new RRIs, to be endorsed by the Conference of the Contracting Parties or intersessionally by the Standing Committee. The Secretariat sent Parties a diplomatic note (Note 2023/3) on 3 April 2023 inviting the submission of proposals by 30 September 2023 for new RRIs to be formally recognized during the period of the 2023-2025 triennium.
15. The Secretariat received one proposal, on 29 September 2023, on the establishment of the Danube WILDisland initiative as a Ramsar Regional Initiative. The proposal was evaluated by the Secretariat using the criteria in Resolution XIV.7 and the *Operational Guidelines for Ramsar Regional Initiatives*.
16. The Secretariat has received ten letters of support from Contracting Parties at the time of finalization of this document. The evaluation result, as presented in Annex 2 of this document, is that the Danube WILDisland initiative meets the requirements for an RRI outlined in the *Operational Guidelines*.
17. The Secretariat requests that the Standing Committee at its 63rd meeting (SC63) consider the Danube WILDisland RRI for endorsement as operating within the framework of the Convention.

## Allocation of Convention core budget funds for activities of new RRIs in 2024

18. In paragraph 17 of Resolution XIV.7, the Conference of the Parties notes that “RRIs that have been endorsed as operating within the framework of the Convention are eligible for start-up financial support from the core budget of the Convention” and recommends that “the start-up financial support is to be provided for up to six years, according to decisions on budgetary matters”. Through paragraph 18 of the same Resolution, Contracting Parties decided “that the levels of financial support from the Convention core budget to eligible RRIs will be determined annually by the Standing Committee”, based on the annual report submitted by the RRI to the Secretariat, and “informed by the specific recommendations made by the Subgroup on Finance to the Standing Committee”.
19. During SC62, the Standing Committee approved the allocation of CHF 30,000 to SARRI for its activities in 2023 from the core budget line D “Support to Regional Initiatives”. SARRI did not report any expenditure during 2023.
20. For 2024, SARRI and the new proposed Danube WILDisland RRI, if endorsed by the Standing Committee at SC63, are eligible for support. SARRI did not request additional funding from the Convention core budget in 2024 and will use the CHF 30,000 carried over from 2023. Danube WILDisland RRI has requested, as part of its financial report and work plan for 2024, Convention core budget support of 29,000 CHF for 2024. Requests for Convention core budget support are detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Requests for Convention core budget support (in CHF)

Ramsar Regional Initiative	2023 expenditure (CHF)			2024 funding (CHF)		
	Ramsar Approved allocation for 2023	Reported expenditure in 2023	Balance carried forward 2023	Forecast / budgeted expenditure for activities in 2024	Requested 2024 contribution	Secretariat's proposed budget 2024 allocation
SARRI	30,000	0	30,000	50,000	0	0
Danube WILDisland RRI	N/A	N/A	N/A	39,000	29,000	29,000

**Annex 1**  
**Summary of the annual reports of RRIs for 2023-2024**

Ramsar Regional Initiative (RRI) and year of establishment	Principles from Resolution XIV.7					Planned budget for 2023 (CHF unless stated)	Expenditure in 2023 (CHF unless stated)	Financial resources	Key activities	Challenges
	No. of countries supporting the RRI	TORs (incl. ROPs)	Structure and governance	Status/role of the Convention Secretariat	Financial management					
Ramsar Centre for Eastern Africa (RAMCEA), 2009	5	Yes	Governing Council is the policy-making body. The RAMCEA Secretariat is responsible for day-to-day activities and reports to the Governing Council.	Observer	Responsibility of RAMCEA Secretariat. The Collaborative Management Board reviews annual reports and approves the budget and financial regulations. The Secretariat executes the budget.	130,660	40,416.01	Gov't of Uganda Other donors	- Hosted the SG of the Convention on Wetlands - Peatland management and restoration proposal drafted with Wetlands Int'l - Online dialogue held during the Nile Basin Development Forum - Learning visits for twinning of Ramsar Sites conducted - CEPA materials developed and displayed in UNFCCC COP28 - Rapid assessment of Lake Nakuwa and Bisina undertaken	Frequently changing NFPs, Resource mobilization

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	No. of countries supporting the RRI	TORs (incl. ROPs)	Structure and governance	Status/role of the Convention Secretariat	Financial management					
Ramsar Regional Centre for Training and Research in the Western Hemisphere (CREHO), 1999	30	Yes	Governance Body is the Board of Directors (responsible for all financial, administrative and operational decisions).	Permanent. Member of the Board of Directors	Responsibility of the Board to approve budget and oversee financial management.	35,249	35,249	Education First (EF), Panama Audubon Society, others	- Implementation of project "Ensuring Water Security in the Mountain Forests and Wetlands of the Santa Maria River" - Implementation of project "Governance and Green Infrastructure to Mitigate Impact in Parita Bay, Panama" - CEPA programme for students	Resource mobilization and financial stability. Legal identity of the RRI.
Ramsar Regional Center in Central and West Asia (RRC-CWA), 2002	18 (15 Contracting Parties and 3 Non-CPs)	Yes	Administrative bodies are the Collaborative Management Board (CMB) and the RRC-CWA Secretariat. The CMB provides strategic guidance, approves programmes/activities, approves budget and financial regulation, and HR issues.	Collaborative Management Board Member	Collaborative Management Board reviews annual reports and approves the budget and financial regulations.	314,700	65,000	Department of Environment (I.R. Iran), Ramsar Municipality	- 12 online webinars - Celebration of WWD - RRC-CWA quarterly magazine - 3 <sup>rd</sup> Meeting of National Wetland NGOs - Networking with cities, hosting meetings - Establishment of Wetland Radio	Lack of funding. Legal status of Center, challenge in receiving international funds.

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Ramsar Regional Center - East Asia (RRC-EA), 2009	18	Yes	The Steering Committee provides guidance in the development of policies and programmes. The Executive Director leads the day-to-day operations.	Steering Committee member	Reported to Steering Committee.	1,021,026	654,210	Ministry of Environment (Republic of Korea), Suncheon City, Amore-Pacific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training of Wetland Managers (regional, sub-regional, national), development of Eco-DRR guidance</li> <li>- Development of a guidebook on Ramsar Site designation and updating</li> <li>- Organization of WLI-Asia Conference</li> <li>- RRC-EA Wetland Fund</li> <li>- WWD activities in the Republic of Korea</li> <li>- CEPA activities (website, web magazine, documentary production)</li> </ul>	Not stated
Ramsar Regional Initiative for West African Coastal Zone Wetlands (WACoWet), 2009	13	Yes (draft)	The Supervisory Council is in charge of the overall supervision of the policies of the WACoWet Secretariat, and it monitors and reviews implementation of strategies, annual plan, risk management, and financial situation / management.	Observer	Financial & Accounting Procedure Manual (2013) captures the procedures of planning and budget, accounting policy, financial reports, accounting registers / documents.	75,000	8,000	African Voluntary Contribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Virtual meetings to formulate WACoWet strategic plan 2024-2033</li> </ul>	Lack of dedicated staff



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Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Niger River Basin (NigerWet), 2006	9	Yes (draft)	The Supervisory Council is in charge of the overall supervision of the policies of the NigerWet Secretariat, and it monitors and reviews implementation of strategies, annual plan, risk management, and financial situation / management.	Observer	Financial & Accounting Manual (2013) captures the procedures of planning and budget, accounting policy, financial reports, accounting registers / documents.	None	None	None	- Update of Ramsar Site information for Sourou floodplain	Resource mobilization
Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of High Andean Wetlands (HAW), 2005	8	Yes	The Coordination Committee (National Focal Points of member countries) has annual meetings to follow up the implementation of the strategy and its action plan.	Provides support to the Coordination Committee	Coordination Committee (previous Standing Committee allocations were administered by the Secretariat under decisions of the Coordination Committee).	No report	No report	No report	No report	No report

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Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of the Plata River Basin, 2009	5	Yes	The Coordination Committee (member countries) as the governance body reviews progress annually.	Provides support to the Coordination Committee	Coordination Committee (previous Standing Committee allocations were administered by the Secretariat under decisions of Coordination Committee).	None	None	None	- Meeting of the Coordination Committee	Recurring institutional changes Lack of contact within RRI
Caribbean Wetlands Ramsar Regional Initiative (CariWet), 2009	14	Yes	The Regional Initiative Committee is coordinated by two member countries and includes all Contracting Party members of the Initiative, the Convention Secretariat, and the Caribbean sub-regional representatives at the Standing Committee (past, present, and future).	Regional Initiative Committee member providing support	Coordination Committee (previous Standing Committee allocations were administered by the Secretariat under decisions of Coordination Committee).	No report	No report	No report	No report	No report

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	No. of countries supporting the RRI	TORs (incl. ROPs)	Structure and governance	Status/role of the Convention Secretariat	Financial management					
Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of Mangroves and Coral Reefs, 2009	14	Yes	The coordination committee of the Initiative is led by two member countries and includes all Contracting Parties with Secretariat's support.	Provides support to the regional committee	Coordination Committee (previous Standing Committee allocations were administered by the Secretariat under decisions of Coordination Committee).	No report	No report	No report	No report	No report
East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership, 2006	18	No (structural info. is on its website)	The EAAFP Management Committee provides general policy, operational and financial direction to the EAAFP Secretariat. A meeting of the Partnership is held annually to oversee the implementation of the Partnership.	Partner	The EAAFP Finance Sub-Committee provides advises the Secretariat and Partners on overall financial management. Reporting to the Meeting of Partners (MOP).	741,278	380,000	Incheon Metropolitan City government, EAAFP Partner voluntary contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Maintain and develop Flyway Network Sites including small grant programmes and technical advice on local sites</li> <li>- CEPA activities including Youth Think Tank and multiple webinars</li> <li>- Research, monitoring, knowledge including waterbird survey</li> <li>- Capacity building for local rangers</li> <li>- Flyway-wide approaches including support for ADB Regional Flyway Initiative</li> </ul>	Diminishing staff and funding, lack of institutional strength

Ramsar Regional Initiative (RRI) and year of establishment	Principles from Resolution XIV.7					Planned budget for 2023 (CHF unless stated)	Expenditure in 2023 (CHF unless stated)	Financial resources	Key activities	Challenges
	No. of countries supporting the RRI	TORs (incl. ROPs)	Structure and governance	Status/role of the Convention Secretariat	Financial management					
Mediterranean Wetlands Ramsar Regional Initiative (MedWet), 1991	27	Yes	The Initiative includes the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com); the MedWet Steering Group (MedWet/SG); the MedWet Scientific and Technical Network; the MedWet Secretariat. The MedWet/Com is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the initiatives, including approval of strategic documents, annual budget and audited financial reports.	Permanent observer of the MedWet/Steering Group	The MedWet Secretariat administrates the approved budgets and submits the annual financial report to the MedWet/SG and to the MedWet/Com for approval.	345,000 (EUR)	190,250 (EUR)	Partner countries of MedWet, MAVAF Foundation, European Union, French Biodiversity Agency and others	- Development of the Coalition of European Ramsar Regional Initiatives - Growth and consolidation of the Mediterranean Ramsar Site Managers Network - Strong impact of the MedWet Academy including technical workshops and online training courses - Great success of the coordination of the WWD in the Mediterranean	Not stated

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Carpathian Wetland Ramsar Regional Initiative (CWI), 2004	7	Yes	The implementation body of CWI is a Board, which is composed of the focal points of each member. The Board elects a chair to guide the proceedings and meet periodically.	Provide inputs to the Board	Provided by the Board and the coordinating institution of the host country.	31,200 (EUR)	31,968 (EUR)	State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Environment - Czechia, Ministry of Environment - Slovakia Ministry of Agriculture - Hungary, UNE SCC, DANUBEPARKS Association, Wetlands Int'l, Danube-Carpathian Programme, Convention funding carryover from previous years	- Continued activities from previous years - Enforced networking, cooperation with relevant regional networks, partners, Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, voluntary contributions from some ministries of the Carpathian countries to the CWI budget - CWI and wetland issues integrated in the Carpathian Convention documents and plans - Project proposals consulted and submitted - Development of the European Coalition of Ramsar Regional Initiatives with support of CWI - International training course and study tour on wetland restoration organized in cooperation with the Czech government and the Ramsar Committee - International poster exhibition and contest EKOPLAGÁT	Capacities of coordination of RRI, governance and legal entity of RRI, war in Ukraine

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	No. of countries supporting the RRI	TORs (incl. ROPs)	Structure and governance	Status/role of the Convention Secretariat	Financial management					
Nordic-Baltic Wetlands Ramsar Regional Initiatives (NorBalWet), 2005	10	Yes	The Coordination Group composed of the National Focal Points of each participating country is the decision-making body.	Permanent observer of the Coordination Group	Host Country provides administrative support.	2,000	2,000	Norwegian Environment Agency (NEA), Faroe Islands Env. Agency	- RRI meeting in Faroe Islands - Action plan / workplan under discussion	Lack of capacity among members
Ramsar Regional Initiative on Black and Azov Seas Coastal Wetlands (BlackSeaWet), 2007	7	Yes	The implementing bodies are the Management Body and the National Working Groups. The responsibilities of the Management Body include taking strategic decisions and approving and monitoring annual work plans.	Member of Management Body	Provided by the Government of Ukraine (No detailed information)	35,000	5,000	Not stated	- Creation of the online web-page - Exchange of information on invasive alien species - Wetland management plan of Kizilirmak Delta revised - National wetland inventory database of Türkiye finalized	Not stated
Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Senegal River Basin (SenegalWet), 2016	4	Yes (by-laws and internal regulations)	The governance bodies are: the Commission, the Governing Board, and the Secretariat of the Initiative. The Commission's responsibilities include making decision on directions of the Initiative, approving strategies, programme and work plan, and controlling financial resources.	No detailed information	Yes (by-laws and internal regulations).	No report	No report	No report	No report	No report

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	No. of countries supporting the RRI	TORs (incl. ROPs)	Structure and governance	Status/role of the Convention Secretariat	Financial management					
Regional Initiative for the Amazon River Basin, 2016	7	Yes	The Initiative is coordinated by the Coordination Committee, of which the members are the National Focal Points.	The Convention Secretariat supports the governance body	Managed by the Convention Secretariat under decisions of the coordinator of the Initiative.	24,000	None	Convention's core budget (Balance carried over from previous year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Meeting of RRI countries</li> <li>- Implementation of project activities in each country within the framework of the regional GEF-7 programme</li> <li>- Agreed on a definition of the methodology to unify and standardize priority activities in the action plan</li> </ul>	Not stated
Ramsar Regional Initiative for Central Asia (RRI-CA), 2016	5	No	The decision-making body is the Coordination Committee, which is composed of three key members and six alternatives members from member countries.	Observer	Technical Secretary of the RRI-CA (based at CAREC).	49,650	178,715	CAREC WWF and CEPF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- RRI-CA coordination meeting</li> <li>- Rejuvenation of Tugai ecosystems of the Tigrovaya Balka and Kairakum</li> <li>- Waterfowl census and wetland condition assessment</li> <li>- Nomination of sites in Central Asia for Ramsar Sites</li> <li>- Updating of RRI-CA websites</li> <li>- Identification of potential donors</li> <li>- Two capacity building conferences</li> </ul>	Resource mobilization and institutional strengthening

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Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative (IBRRI), 2016	5	Yes	The Steering Committee, which is composed of the Administrative Authorities of member countries, provides oversight of the Initiative's operation.	Observer	Managed by IUCN Asia Regional Office.	140,000	96,034	BRIDGE project (SDC)	- IBRRI Steering Committee meeting and technical workshop - Development of GCF concept note - IBRRI site designation strategy publication preparation - Support for WWD, CEPA activities	Limited funding, political situation in a member country
Southern African Ramsar Regional Initiative (SARRI), 2022	12	No	Under discussion	TBD	In discussion with IUCN South Africa	30,000	None	Convention core budget support	- Selection of a task team for the establishment of the SARRI governance and operational framework - Signing of the hosting agreement letter with IUCN Securing financial and technical support from the French government whether OFB, MedWet, NatureXpairs will support SARRI.	Need institutional support to start a new RRI
International Mangrove Center (IMC)	13	Yes	IMC Standing Committee IMC Scientific and Technical Subgroup Technical Support Unit IMC Secretariat	Observer	IMC Secretariat	1,026,000	1,876,260	NFGA, PRC Shenzhen Municipal Gov't	- International workshop on mangrove conservation and collaboration and high-level forum on mangrove conservation organized	Data gap on global mangrove, language challenges among member CPs



## Annex 2

### Review of documentation submitted by the proposed new Ramsar Regional Initiative

#### A. The aim of Ramsar's Regional Initiatives

1. RRIs as an operational means to provide effective support for improved implementation of the objectives of the Convention and its Strategic Plan and to raise the visibility of the Convention in the region.
  - **The Danube WILDIsland Ramsar Regional Initiative (DWI RRI)** will strive to provide practical means for international cooperation and support for an effective implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan in the Danube Basin region, in particular, implementation of Resolutions VII.9, XIV.6 and XIV.8 on enhancing the visibility of the Convention, as well as Resolutions VIII.30, IX.9 and XIV.7 on Ramsar Regional Initiatives.
2. How the RRI aligns its activities and operational targets with the objectives of the Convention's Strategic Plan 2016-2024.
  - **The strategic objective of the DWI RRI is, as the first river-focused Ramsar Regional Initiative in Europe, to foster international and cross-sector cooperation and natural river and island protection, at the world's most international river.**
  - There are **six specific targets** of the **DWI RRI**, as shown below:
    - i. to **promote the effective implementation of the Strategic Plan of the Convention**, its pertinent Resolutions and relevant policies and initiatives in the Danube region by supporting actions on the ground by governments, civil society organizations and the private sector;
    - ii. to **foster international and cross-sector cooperation** and natural river island protection, **gain political support** to strengthen the Danube as an ecological corridor connecting more bio-geographic regions than any other corridor in Europe, and act as an example of best practices for the establishment of European Green and Blue Infrastructure, stressing the restoration of river dynamics and natural hydrological regimes;
    - iii. to **preserve, develop and restore the Danube River**, its adjacent floodplains and main tributaries as an integrating ecosystem and inspiring lifeline for the new European macro-region and its inhabitants;
    - iv. to **reinforce capacities** in areas where these are not sufficiently developed, and especially to **develop and ensure adaptive and integrated management and wise use** of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites) and other wetlands;
    - v. to **transfer and exchange knowledge and expertise** among key conservation and sustainable use actors in order to reinforce Danube wetland management; and
    - vi. to **coordinate with other regional and international actions and programmes** relevant to wetland conservation and sustainable use, thereby serving to build synergies to support the implementation of the Convention in the region.

3. The geographical region and a list of the countries that will actively participate.
  - The geographical region is Danube islands, Ramsar Sites and other protected areas along the Danube corridor and the tributary rivers.
  - The participating Contracting Parties (ten):
    - Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Serbia, Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine.
  
4. List of Ramsar Administrative Authorities and all other participating stakeholders, such as Ministries other than those responsible for the implementation of the Convention on Wetlands, intergovernmental bodies, the Convention on Wetlands' International Organization Partners (IOPs), local communities, NGOs, economic actors, etc. that the RRI will be engaging.
  - The **DWI RRI** proposes to work with:
    - Governments of the member Contracting Parties listed in question 3 above, represented by the Administrative Authorities of the Convention;
    - Based on the resolution by the International Commission on the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), **Bosnia-Herzegovina, Czechia, Montenegro and Slovenia** will also be directly addressed by and involved in the work of the RRI and cooperation will also be sought with **Albania, Italy, Macedonia, Poland and Switzerland**; and
    - The International Commission on the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), the European Danube Region Strategy (EUSDR), IUCN, other RRI (Black Sea Wet, Carpathian Wetland Initiative, MedWet, NorBalWet), NGOs and 21 Danube Protected Area administrations.

## B. Coordination Mechanisms

5. RRI's plan to assure coordination between the Parties and other members of the RRI. Coordinating functions assigned to Parties or participating institutions on a rotating basis, and modalities to be reflected in a regional agreement.
  - The formal management of the DWI RRI is carried out by a **Steering Group (SG)**, comprising representatives of all Country Members, Non-Country Members and Observers. The SG members meet and make decisions in line with the DWI RRI terms of reference.<sup>2</sup>
  - The **Coordination Unit (CoU)**, responsible for the coordination of the activities and the practical implementation of the workplan of the DWI RRI is the **Danube WILDisland Office**. This is an especially established **distinct regional office of the DANUBEPARKS Association**, fully devoted to the coordination of the RRI with a **full-time coordinator**, hosted at the the Lower Danube's Persina Nature Park, Bulgaria or the Danube Delta Biosphere Park Authority (DDBRA, Romania and Ukraine).
  
6. RRI's plans to develop an own identity, a specific logo (to be used in combination with the Ramsar logo) to avoid any confusion between its role and those of the Ramsar Administrative Authorities and the Secretariat and to establish and regularly update a website for the RRI.
  - The Danube WILDisland initiative has already developed its own identity since 2017. The **DWI RRI aims to further develop and to establish this identity over the long term**, which specifies its independence, status and role. The DWI RRI will create and use its own website to promote and distinguish the Initiative and will use the logo of the Convention for further promotion and in line with the Convention rules.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.ramsar.org/document/terms-reference-danube-wildisland-ramsar-regional-initiative>.

7. RRI's plans to coordinate regional projects or programmes which are ongoing or developed under the Initiative, and note if professional staff will be involved in their implementation or supervision.
  - The Danube WILDisland initiative has been collecting information on islands in the Danube river system since 2012.
  - DWI RRI will continue to develop and implement the LIFE WILDisland project, involving 15 partners from eight countries.
  - In the future, DWI RRI will facilitate the development of new follow-up projects aiming to boost to its operational work in the entire Danube River Basin. As an example, a draft concept has already been elaborated for an Interreg Danube region project aiming to promote this unique RRI, to build up its management structure and foster its functionality, and to test best practice examples for implementation in the field of WILDisland conservation, restoration, as well as communication and policy work. The project is expected to be submitted in 2025.

### C. Governance

8. RRI's plan to establish in the region existing or planned mechanisms to provide governance, coordination and advice (committees, boards, etc.), and how all relevant Contracting Parties and other stakeholders will be able to provide guidance and insight.
  - The DWI RRI governance structure consists of three bodies:
    - i. Steering Group as a Management Body (DWI RRI SG);
    - ii. Danube WILDisland regional office at the DANUBEPARKS Association as a Coordinating Unit (CoU);
    - iii. Expert working groups as an advisory body;
9. RRIs have or plan to have terms of reference, rules of procedure, structure, and membership, and/or other written regulations which the Initiative has established or is planning.

#### *Existing:*

- **Terms of Reference** (rules of procedure, structure, membership included)
- **Statutes of the DANUBEPARKS Association**

#### *In process, in preparation:*

- **Long-term Strategic Plan** (to be prepared within a comprehensive process; for the discussion and definition of the long-term perspectives for the DWIRRI, a process will be started immediately after the adoption of this RRI; this process includes a series of workshops, the exchange of experiences with existing RRI, and the involvement of key stakeholders in this process). The document will combine the Resolutions and the Strategic Plan of the Convention with other global agendas in biodiversity, climate, land and sustainable development.
- **Communication strategy** (a working group for communication will be formed to define the internal communication in detail, and to elaborate the strategy for external communication and stakeholder involvement).
- **Guidance for non-discrimination and equality** in the work of the DWI RRI (elaborated together with external experts, see point 8).

### D. Substantive Elements

10. RRI's approach to create an enabling environment in the region, provide a framework for the development of collaborative networks, and seek collaboration with other intergovernmental or

regional and international agencies, local NGOs, and partners, including Ramsar IOPs operating in the region.

- The DWI RRI will use the existing network of the DANUBEPARKS Association, work with the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), engage with the EU Strategy for the Danube Region as an observer in the Steering Group of EUSDR Task Force, and seek to engage with IUCN and others.
11. RRI's plan to make optimal use of the Ramsar tools and to consider strong scientific and technical backing provided by relevant institutions to become partners in the Initiative.
- **The DWI RRI** will seek to use various tools offered by the Convention on Wetlands, in particular, Handbooks 1, 2, 6, 9, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20 and Technical Reports.
12. RRI's plans to raise the visibility of the Convention and awareness of Convention objectives, with specific activities to increase the visibility of the Convention and the general understanding of its objectives.
- In line with its Framework for Action 2016-2030, the DWI RRI will develop a communication strategy as a road map to bring the relevant messages and images across the various priority targets. The DWI RRI will use its own logo, website and newsletter as a means of communication, yet the Convention logo will be used side-by-side, following all the rules and regulations and acknowledging the fact that the RRI can only act by mandate of its constituents and it does not form part of any national or local authority or organization, even if such a body is providing support or hosting arrangements.
  - Visibility through the use of the logo, name or key Convention documents will be provided through a variety of means organized within or through the DWI RRI, such as: joint publications and policies (strategies, plans, etc.), publications (website, brochures, guidelines, signboards, etc.), workshops, meetings and conferences (capacity-building events, concept and project preparation, annual meetings, etc.) and awareness campaigns (for example Danube Day, Volunteers Day, Danube Art Masters).

## **E. Financial and Other Support**

13. RRI's plan on expenditure and financial requirements for the period 2024-2025 and financial support providers, including amounts that have been firmly pledged and the needs not yet covered. Also, describe planned expenditures and the sources and payments of secured income for the year 2022.
- Total planned expenditure per year will be around CHF 105,500 for the period 2025-2027. Total planned expenditure for 2024 is expected to be CHF 39,000.
  - Budget will be spent on 1) management and coordination, 2) communication, visibility and networking, 3) conservation and restoration of Danube WILDIslands, and 4) capacity building.
  - Sources of income will include:
    - Contribution by the Member states (project-based);
    - Start-up support by the Convention's core budget;
    - Financial support by international organizations;
    - EU-funded projects (LIFE WILDIsland (ongoing), Interreg Ramsar WILDIsland (in preparation), Horizon Danube4all (ongoing), various smaller EU grants);

- Donors and partnerships (private contributions, donations from the private business sector, foundations and trusts);
14. Requesting for start-up funding from the core funding. If yes, a plan on how the Initiative will generate its resources and become financially self-sufficient after the start-up phase and in the long term.
- In line with the relevant Resolution, the DWI RRI would like to be considered for start-up financial support from the **Convention core budget, starting from June 2024.**
  - **Requested amount for 2024 - CHF 29,000**
  - **Subsequent years - CHF 30,000 per year.**
15. Plan on how the RRI will implement financial management to ensure transparency and accountability.
- The CoU of the DWI RRI is responsible for the compilation of the annual financial reports by March every following year. The annual reports are then presented, revised and endorsed by the DWI RRI SG and also submitted to the Management Board of the DANUBEPARKS and the Secretariat of the Convention.
  - The Annual Reports will also be published on the DWI RRI website, and so will be publicly available.
  - Financial audit is, first, ensured by the DANUBEPARKS audit commission at the DANUBEPARKS Association (see Statute, Annex 2), which controls independently the work of the DANUBEPARKS Association, including the DWI RRI Management Unit as a regional office of the Association.
  - Additionally, an external financial audit will be engaged for all financial income and outspending, transactions and businesses related to the work of the DWI RRI.
16. Bodies that have expressed political support in addition to those which have submitted a National Letter of Support.
- Not Available.
17. List of the letters of support (Form B submission) by national Ramsar Administrative Authorities and other partners.
- Ten Contracting Parties have submitted a national letter of support: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine.