

## Report of the Strategic Plan Working Group

### Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to note:

- i. the progress report of the Strategic Plan Working Group (SPWG);
- ii. the workshops on the development of the fifth Strategic Plan (SP5) scheduled to be held in conjunction with the 62nd meeting of the Standing Committee;
- iii. the Secretariat's update of the fourth Strategic Plan (SP4); and
- iv. the communication of existing guidance/tools to Contracting Parties to support their implementation of SP4.

### Background

1. The Working Group on the review of the (Fourth) Strategic Plan recommended to Standing Committee (SC59) in June 2021, that a new working group be established ahead of the 14th meeting of the Conference of Contracting Parties (COP14), to ensure there is sufficient time to develop the fifth Strategic Plan for adoption at COP15.
2. The Standing Committee through Decision 59-20 agreed:
  - i. to establish a new working group with membership from Contracting Parties, the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and International Organization Partners (IOPs), to commence preparation of the Fifth Strategic Plan of the Convention;
  - ii. that the terms of reference and work plan should be agreed intersessionally, and be designed to accommodate the key elements and any additional priority elements and modalities for the Fifth Strategic Plan (SP5) that may be agreed at COP14;
  - iii. to encourage the participation of members of the Working Group on the Review of the Fourth Strategic Plan (SP4) in the new working group, for continuity purposes.
3. In early 2022, the Secretariat issued a call for nominations of members for the new working group. The following Parties were nominated to become members during the period leading up to COP15: Algeria, Australia, Bahrain, Brazil, Canada, Chad, China, Finland, Kenya, Mauritius, Mexico, Nicaragua, Oman, Slovenia, South Africa and Tunisia, as well as the International Water Management Institute and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust on behalf of the Convention's IOPs, Youth Engaged in Wetlands and an expert of the STRP.

4. These nominations provided good regional representation, particularly of developing countries, and some continuity in membership with the Working Group on the review of SP4. It also demonstrated a high level of interest and engagement of Contracting Parties in this important task.

#### **Strategic Plan Working Group activities up to COP14**

5. The inaugural meeting of the new working group was chaired by Australia on 23 May 2022 in Gland, ahead of the resumed session of SC59. Australia nominated and was confirmed as Chair up until COP14. The working group considered the preparatory work that could be progressed, especially the opportunities for consultation on SP5 at COP14, and its draft terms of reference and a work plan to COP14, for intersessional decision by the Standing Committee. Switzerland expressed interest and was accepted as a member of the working group, with Japan confirming its participation during the meeting.
6. The terms of reference (ToR) for the working group and workplan to COP14 was approved intersessionally by Standing Committee in August 2022, and was consistent with guidance provided by the Efficiency Working Group in Resolution XIV.3. The ToR was updated to include the agreed framework for preparation of the plan in Resolution XIV.4 (see Annex 1). The ToR emphasised inclusivity and enabling broad participation in the composition of, and regional representation on, the working group and its operational structure.
7. The second meeting of the working group was chaired by Australia on 6 November 2022 in Geneva ahead of COP14. The group considered the programme of preliminary SP5 consultation activities proposed for COP14 and the draft resolution, *Review of the fourth Strategic Plan of the Convention on Wetlands, additions for the period COP14-COP15 and key elements for the fifth Strategic Plan* (COP14 Doc 18.4).
8. At COP14, Contracting Parties adopted Resolution XIV.4, reaffirming decisions SC59-20 and SC59-32, to establish a new Strategic Plan Working Group and approve the budget to prepare the Fifth Strategic Plan. Parties further noted that the existing group had commenced preparatory work to ensure a draft Plan is ready for adoption at COP15.

#### **Strategic Plan Working Group Activities post COP14**

9. At SC61 on 13 November 2022, Australia, supported by Colombia, nominated Brazil and Canada as new Co-chairs of the Working Group. Post SC61, the following Contracting Parties comprise the SPWG: Algeria, Australia, Bahrain, Botswana, Chad, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czechia, Eswatini, Finland, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Japan, Kenya, Mauritius, Mexico, Nicaragua, Oman, Republic of Korea, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Switzerland, Tunisia, Uganda, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Zambia and the STRP Chair, a representative of the International Water Management Institute, a representative of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and a representative of Youth Engaged in Wetlands.
10. Following an open tender process in early 2023, a panel consisting of two members of the SPWG and a representative of the Secretariat selected WRM Wetlands & Environment Ltd (Rob McInnes, Director, supported by a team of regional focal points) to undertake the next phases of SP5 development in collaboration with the SPWG.

11. The third meeting of the SPWG was held on 28 March 2023 with Canada and Brazil confirmed as the new Co-chairs. The meeting considered the outcomes of the preliminary consultation at COP14, the draft Engagement Strategy for SP5 and workplan to COP15.
12. The key message emerging from the COP14 consultation is the need for a bottom-up process to develop SP5 to ensure all Parties, regions and partners have an opportunity to contribute to shaping the Plan, so it is relevant to and respects the wetland conservation needs of different regions, and the differing priorities and capacities of Contracting Parties. The need to strengthen capacity building in developing regions to support the Plan's implementation was a recurring theme.
13. The draft Engagement Strategy for SP5 has been circulated to SPWG members on 30 March 2023, and will be finalised mid-year to enable its implementation as part of the next phases of work to develop SP5. The draft Strategy identifies the key partners and stakeholders and provides principles to guide the development of the plan to enable effective participation of all interested Contracting Parties, partners and stakeholders, consistent with Resolution XIV.4.
14. SPWG members have been invited to be active participants in the process to prepare SP5 and to consider how they will involve their colleagues, partners, and regions more broadly.
15. Quarterly meetings of the SPWG are proposed with the next meeting be held in early June 2023 to finalise the Engagement Strategy. This will be followed by half-day workshops in conjunction with SC62 in Gland in September. The Co-chairs will be undertaking outreach intersessionally to update Parties, IOPs, and the Chairs of other Ramsar working groups on progress towards SP5.

#### **Update of the Fourth Ramsar Strategic plan 2016-2024 and support for implementation**

16. The Secretariat has published the revised fourth Ramsar Strategic Plan, updated as requested in Resolution XIV.4 and published in the three languages of the Convention<sup>1</sup>. Annex 2 has been updated to map the new Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) targets with the Strategic Plan goals and targets and, the three new thematic Annexes have been included to: support Parties with the practical implementation of the SDGs; the new approach to communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness (CEPA); and integrating gender considerations.
17. The Secretariat will circulate and publicise existing Ramsar guidance to assist Parties with their implementation of SP4, noting the decision of Parties that the term of the fourth Plan be extended from 2024 until the occurrence of COP15 to ensure continuity between successive Strategic Plans. This outreach will be targeted to those Parties experiencing challenges with implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.ramsar.org/document/the-4th-strategic-plan-2016-2024-2022-update>.

## Annex 1

### Terms of Reference <sup>2</sup>

#### 5th Strategic Plan Working Group (SP5WG)

##### 1. Purpose of the SP5WG

The 5th Strategic Plan Working Group established by the Standing Committee (Decision SC59-20) is to:

- a) develop for consideration at COP15, the fifth Ramsar Strategic Plan 2025-2030, taking account of:
  - i) input from Contracting Parties, Convention bodies, working groups and IOPs,
  - ii) the outcomes of the review of the fourth Strategic Plan,
  - iii) the agreed framework in XIV.4 for preparation of the Fifth Strategic Plan, that:
    - *Encourages* the new Working Group to keep the Goals of the fourth Strategic Plan in the fifth Ramsar Strategic Plan to maintain consistency and continuity in reporting, and to take into account the role of wetland conservation and restoration in promoting sustainable development and addressing global environmental challenges;
    - *Decides* that the fifth Strategic Plan will be informed by, *inter alia*, the Special Edition 2021 of the *Global Wetland Outlook*, the Convention Secretariat's analysis of the national reports, as well as key agreed elements external to the Convention including: the SDGs, the Global Biodiversity Framework, wetland contributions to the UNFCCC, the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, and any relevant work of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other global programmes relating to wetlands;
    - *Recognizes* the important role that all partners and stakeholders – individuals, societies and organizations – can play, and the need to enable the contributions in particular of Indigenous Peoples, youth, all women and girls, local communities and the business sector to conserving, restoring and wisely using wetlands and to providing solutions to global environmental, social and economic challenges;
    - *Decides* that the process to develop the fifth Strategic Plan be inclusive, transparent and accessible to enable the full and effective participation of all interested Contracting Parties, partners and stakeholders; and
    - *Encourages* the new Working Group to use the thematic Annexes to the fourth Strategic Plan in the framing and development of the draft fifth Strategic Plan.
- b) develop a comprehensive programme of consultation and engagement for SP5 that is tailored to the needs of the Contracting Parties and their regions, and other Convention bodies, IOPs and external stakeholders;
- c) appoint facilitators to undertake preparatory engagement prior to COP14 and facilitate a programme of engagement with key stakeholders at COP14, and post-COP14.
- d) regularly report its progress to the Standing Committee.

The Secretariat shall under the guidance of the Working Group, assist with contracting appropriate consultant/s to support the work of the Strategic Plan Working Group.

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<sup>2</sup> The ToR was approved intersessionally by Standing Committee in August 2022 and updated November 2022 to include the Framework for preparation of the fifth Ramsar Strategic Plan Resolution XIV.4 (paras. 18 to 22).

## 2. Composition and regional representation

- The Working Group will have membership from Contracting Parties, with all regions represented;
- The Chairs of the STRP and CEPA Outreach Panel will liaise with the Working Group, and, if they find it suitable, they or any appointed member of the STRP and CEPA can join the Working Group as members;
- International Organization Partners representatives are welcome to be members;
- The Working Group may invite external parties to observe and attend meetings as required.

## 3. Structure, meetings and Secretariat support

- The Working Group will appoint among itself a Chair, and a Vice Chair and any other roles that it deems necessary;
- The Working Group will hold meetings using means that allow the full and active participation of all members and/or regions in the group. These may be face-to-face (in association with other Ramsar meetings), hybrid or virtual, the latter using an agreed platform to which all members have access;
- The Working Group will take decisions by consensus;
- The Chair and Vice Chair will liaise and work closely with other bodies of the Convention and relevant working groups and/or external parties as necessary for development of SP5;
- The Secretariat will provide secretariat services for the Working Group (meeting invitations and minutes) and act as a point of contact.