

Report of the process undertaken by the Secretariat to include a site on the List of Wetlands of International Importance

Actions requested

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. consider the procedure undertaken by the Secretariat to include a site on the List of Wetlands of International Importance; and
- ii. provide recommendations to the Secretariat to include a site on the List of Wetlands of International Importance.

Background

1. Resolution XIV.13 on *The Status of Sites in the List of Wetlands of International Importance*, in paragraph 21, requests the Secretariat to prepare a technical report on the procedure which it undertakes to include a site on the List of Wetlands of International Importance, that covers all the steps of this process, for consideration by the Standing Committee at its 62nd meeting (SC62). The Resolution further decides to defer consideration of the amended draft resolution on the Ramsar List (document COP14 Doc.18.16 Rev.1¹) to COP15, to be informed by the results of the technical report and relevant discussions at the upcoming Standing Committee meetings.
2. In line with the above, this technical report describes the procedure undertaken by the Secretariat to include a site on the List of Wetlands of International Importance.

Distinction between designation of Wetlands of International Importance and listing

3. Article 2.1 of the Convention states that each Contracting Party shall designate suitable wetlands within its territory for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance.
4. The Contracting Party chooses when to designate a Wetland of International Importance ("Ramsar Site"), once it has prepared the Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS), including map and GIS shapefile, and submitting these to the Secretariat ("designation").
5. The Secretariat adds the Ramsar Site to the List of Wetlands of International Importance ("listing") after the RIS has been checked and signed off by the Regional Advisor.

¹ See <https://www.ramsar.org/document/cop14-doc1816-rev1-amended-draft-resolution-on-the-ramsar-list>.

Responsibilities of the Secretariat in the inclusion of a site on the List of Wetlands of International Importance

6. Article 8.2 of the Convention states that the continuing duties of the Secretariat shall include the following:
 - b) *to maintain the List of Wetlands of International Importance and to be informed by the Contracting Parties of any additions, extensions, deletions or restrictions concerning wetlands included in the List provided in accordance with paragraph 5 of Article 2;*
 - c) *to be informed by the Contracting Parties of any changes in the ecological character of wetlands included in the List provided in accordance with paragraph 2 of Article 3;*
 - d) *to forward notification of any alterations to the List, or changes in character of wetlands included therein, to all Contracting Parties and to arrange for these matters to be discussed at the next Conference;*
 - e) *to make known to the Contracting Party concerned, the recommendations of the Conferences in respect of such alterations to the List or of changes in the character of wetlands included therein.*
7. Since the second meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP2, Groningen, 1984), the Secretariat has fulfilled these duties by submitting a specific report to each meeting of the COP (pursuant to Article 8.2, paragraph d).

Guidance of the Convention in identifying and designating Wetlands of International Importance

8. Recommendation 4.7 on *Mechanisms for improved application of the Ramsar Convention (1990)* established procedures for the collation of standardized information on Ramsar Sites at the time of their listing. The content and structure of the Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) has been reviewed and revised by the Conference of the Contracting Parties periodically since 1990. Also in 1990, Recommendation 4.2 adopted the “Criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance” (the “Ramsar Criteria”).
9. The *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance of the Convention on Wetlands (Resolution XI.8 Annex 2)* and the *Ramsar Site Information Sheet (RIS) – 2012 (Annex 1) revision* as annexed to the same Resolution guide the selection and description of Ramsar Sites, both at the time of designation and subsequent updates. The *RIS – 2012 revision* format and its accompanying *Strategic Framework – 2012 revision* entered into use from January 2015 for designations of new Sites, extensions to existing Sites and updates on existing Sites.
10. In line with the Strategic Framework, the Secretariat’s responsibility is to check the RIS, including the map with clearly defined boundaries and the GIS shape file supplied by the Contracting Party, to confirm that, in particular:
 - a. the Site does qualify as internationally important, and so can be put on the Ramsar List (i.e., that the Ramsar Criteria and their guidance have been applied correctly, as set out in Resolution XI.8 *Strategic Framework*);

- b. the information provided is in line with the *Strategic Framework* and its guidelines and COP11 Ramsar Site Information Sheet (RIS) – 2012.

Overall process for designating a Wetland of International Importance

11. The process for designating a Wetland of International Importance is as follows:

- i. A Contracting Party designates a site and sends the RIS, that includes a map with clearly defined boundaries and a GIS shape file, and a letter to the Secretariat through the Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS) stating that the wetland is being designated for inclusion in the Ramsar List <https://rsis Ramsar.org/ris-search/>.
- ii. The Secretariat checks the RIS, map and GIS shapefile, and confirms that the RIS contains the necessary information in line with the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance of the Convention on Wetlands* (Resolution XI.8 Annex 2), and that the site fulfils the Criteria for designation.

The process of review involves checking the RIS, map and GIS shape file (making sure the site being designated lies wholly within the territory of the country concerned). Regional Teams within the Secretariat note in the corresponding field of the RIS incorrect or missing information, information provided in the wrong place and inconsistent information (e.g area of the site) in the different sections of the RIS. Following the review by the Secretariat, questions and suggested amendments to the RIS are provided to the Contracting Party. The Contracting Party then revises the RIS for further review by the Secretariat. The Contracting Party must confirm the amendments and/or approve a revised RIS. Once all questions and RIS content have been addressed, the Secretariat's Senior Advisor checks the RIS and map and signs off on the RIS.

- iii. The Secretariat adds the Ramsar Site to the List (of Wetlands of International Importance), after the RIS has been checked and signed off by the Senior Regional Advisor, the Deputy Secretary General and then the Secretary General.
 - iv. An overview of the Site and the map are published in the Ramsar Sites Information Service at <https://rsis Ramsar.org/>.
 - v. An announcement of the designation is published on the website of the Convention in the three official languages, and Contracting Parties are notified of the new designation.
 - vi. The relevant Administrative Authority and site manager receive an official letter from the Secretariat informing them of the addition of the Site to the List of Wetlands of International Importance.
12. The same process is followed whether the Secretariat receives a new site or an updated RIS for an existing Site. Contracting Parties are expected to provide an updated RIS and map at intervals of not more than six years.
13. An exception to the above process occurs when a Contracting Party designates at least one wetland to be included in the List when signing the Convention or when depositing its instrument of ratification or accession, as provided in Article 9 (Article 2.4). Since the RIS process was developed after the Convention text was agreed, the Convention requires that when a new Contracting Party joins the Convention it only needs to provide the name of its first

Ramsar Site and the boundaries of the site precisely described and delimited on a map (Article 2.1). Therefore, on a country's accession, the Secretariat may not receive a completed RIS for the first site. The Secretariat encourages an acceding Party to provide an RIS at the time of its accession as this makes the review process more efficient.

14. The Secretariat over the years has established a process for the review of RIS in accordance with the mandates and guidance given by the Convention and the Conference of the Contracting Parties. The Secretariat recognizes further opportunities for improvement and welcomes recommendations from the Standing Committee.