

## **Operational Guidelines for Ramsar Regional Initiatives to support the implementation of the Convention (Resolution XIV.7 Part A, Annex 1)**

1. Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) under the Convention on Wetlands are intended as operational means to provide effective support for an improved implementation of the objectives of the Convention and its Strategic Plan.
2. The Operational Guidelines are an effort to ensure that the RRIs are actively supporting Contracting Parties with a common interest in a particular area, region or ecosystem, to protect wetlands in the Convention on Wetlands framework.
3. The RRIs have various types of governance and coordination approaches, as well as operational and financial management practices. RRIs can be regional centres or networks, or a mixture of both, can be cooperation networks without a legal status or established organizations with their own legal status, and can have different kinds of governance and coordination approaches.
4. The Operational Guidelines aim to ensure that the Contracting Parties at meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP) provide greater recognition and a stronger formal endorsement to well-performing RRIs. This type of recognition will facilitate the efforts of RRIs to mobilize resources and obtain more support from third parties, including donors willing to fund regional projects for improved implementation of the Convention in the various regions. Additionally, it is as important that the COP is made aware of challenges faced by some RRIs.
5. The Operational Guidelines should be considered as a guide for the sustainability of RRIs, allowing them to ensure their long-term effectiveness.
6. Those proposing new regional initiatives must apply to the Standing Committee or the COP through the Secretariat to become an RRI. The application will follow the template in Annex 2 of this Resolution.
7. RRIs complying with all requirements should receive a certificate for the endorsed period by the COP or the Standing Committee.

### **Chapter 1: The aim and scope of RRIs**

8. RRIs should support the operational implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan in the geographical area they are covering. RRIs improve implementation of the Convention through international cooperation within the region on wetland-related issues of common concern, involving relevant stakeholders.
9. RRIs could either be physically established centres that have a regional training or capacity building programme, regional cooperation networks with no physical centre, or a combination of both.
10. Geographical regions to be covered by RRIs are defined according to the wetland-related needs of the relevant actors in their region. RRIs are intended to provide lasting structural and operational support to facilitate and improve the implementation of the Convention in the region concerned.

## **Chapter 2: Governance and operation of the RRI**

11. Contracting Parties have the main responsibility to create, manage, develop, supervise and coordinate the operation of an RRI and establish its coordinating body. This responsibility may be delegated through any appropriate arrangement.
12. All Contracting Parties that are members of a given RRI are encouraged to participate in the activities carried out during the year, according to the established workplan. When this is not the case, the coordination body of the RRI will lead a process to promote the active participation of the Contracting Parties.
13. RRI establish their own governance and advisory mechanisms in order to provide leadership, coordination, guidance and accountability in a transparent and equitable manner. This requires the establishment of a governing body made up of the participating Contracting Parties and other relevant stakeholders, and a coordination body. The institutional arrangements of each RRI are defined in its operative rules and should encourage the active participation of all Contracting Party members of the Initiative.
14. The governing body meets regularly, guides the RRI, defines its mandates, rules and principles of procedure, decides on how different work tasks for the activities of the RRI are to be distributed, monitors its activities, work programme and its resources, and provides all its members with relevant information. The operational procedures are made available to the public, for example at the individual RRI website or the RRI's webpage on the Convention website.
15. All Contracting Parties which are members of an RRI are encouraged to contribute to the RRI, by financial and/or in-kind resources for each triennium as appropriate.
16. RRI may request advice from the Secretariat in order to strengthen their capacity and effectiveness, including for the mobilization of additional resources. The Secretariat will inform the COP of the support activities provided during the triennium.
17. RRI are encouraged to use the best tools such as the existing Convention documents, in particular the technical annexes of the Resolutions, manuals, guidelines, methods, etc. They are encouraged to cooperate with National Focal Points for the Convention, including communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness (CEPA) and Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) Focal Points.
18. The Secretariat and the STRP may be invited to assist in the review of training modules developed by RRI to ensure quality and that contents are aligned with approved global tools and are well adapted to regional contexts. The RRI can also seek assistance from wetland experts, as well as wetland practitioners, for the review of training modules and related publications. On other capacity-building activities, details about the number of individuals or organizations that have benefitted from the undertaken activities, and results of any evaluations undertaken, will be included in the annual reports, to enable assessment of their impact.
19. RRI are encouraged to work in synergy with other initiatives, including programmes of other international agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

### **Chapter 3: Status of the RRIs**

20. Ongoing RRIs are endorsed by the COP.
21. New RRIs are endorsed at the COP or intersessionally by the Standing Committee, provided that their establishment is justified as a response to the needs of the region concerned and that they comply with existing Resolutions and Decisions on RRIs in accordance with the format of Annex 2.
22. RRIs are a part of the implementation mechanism of the Convention. They are not to be considered as regional offices of the Convention or as spokespersons or representatives of the Secretariat of the Convention.
23. The RRIs are encouraged to establish their own identity, which specifies their independence, their status and role. They apply relevant provisions of national legislation and, if needed, seek to obtain a formal recognition in their host country.
24. RRIs can only act by mandate of their constituents. They do not form part of any national or local authority or organization that may provide them with support or hosting arrangements.
25. RRIs are requested to adopt their own logo and are encouraged to have a website. RRIs can use the Convention logo in combination with their own logo. They have to apply Convention rules on the convention logo.

### **Chapter 4: Participation in RRIs**

26. RRIs are encouraged to establish a coordination body to organize periodic meetings, ensuring timely planning and full involvement of Contracting Party members.
27. The coordination body is encouraged to organize meetings for the purpose of exchanging experiences, which involve relevant stakeholders, such as Ministries, governmental organizations, International Organization Partners (IOPs) to the Convention, other non-governmental organizations and civil society, universities, local communities and the private sector, as well as CEPA and STRP National Focal Points of the Convention.
28. Effective partnerships with IOPs and other relevant regional or global organizations should be promoted. The coordination body should develop an annual workplan and its strategic plan in consultation with relevant partners.

### **Chapter 5: Relation between the Secretariat of the Convention and the RRIs**

29. Effective and frequent communication between the RRIs and the Secretariat is important.

### **Chapter 6: The role of the RRIs in implementing the Strategic Plan of the Convention**

30. The workplan of each RRI is aligned with the approved Strategic Plan of the Convention.
31. RRIs that implement their workplan ineffectively in a given triennium might not be endorsed as RRIs in the succeeding triennium by the COP.

32. RRIs are encouraged to include specific activities related to CEPA in the annual work programme and/or projects. RRIs are invited to engage CEPA experts for advice and make use of existing material from other RRIs.

### **Chapter 7: Financing of the RRIs**

33. RRIs have their own systems for accounting and presenting reports, overseen by their governing bodies, unless they are part of one or several of the Contracting Parties' accounting and reporting systems.
34. All participating Contracting Parties are encouraged to provide assistance to RRIs, and donors are encouraged to provide funds for their activities, for example through financing provided for specific projects or programmes.
35. The financial section of the annual report includes information on: the number of Contracting Parties contributing in-kind or financial resources to the implementation of the Initiative; the number of other partners contributing to the Initiative; expenditures against individual activities and results; as well as the amounts of the financial contributions.
36. RRIs take the necessary measures to establish financial sustainability with resources allowing for the development of their activities over the long term.
37. If they lack reliable resources, RRIs are encouraged to prepare a resource mobilization strategy to facilitate the implementation of their annual workplans. RRIs can request the support of the Convention Secretariat to help their effort to find external financial resources.
38. The RRIs which receive core budget funds from the Convention are requested to submit a financial report to the Standing Committee as part of the annual report.
39. Each COP establishes a core budget line to support new RRIs over the coming triennium. The Standing Committee allocates these funds annually, in response to specific requests, to new RRIs that fulfil the Operational Guidelines.
40. RRIs are expected to be financially self-sufficient after receiving financial assistance provided from the core budget of the Convention. RRIs may support the Contracting Parties in the development of project proposals in line with their respective workplan and the Strategic Plan of the Convention.

### **Chapter 8: Reporting and evaluation of the RRIs**

41. RRIs are requested to submit to the Standing Committee through the Secretariat annual financial and progress reports regarding the implementation of their workplan, following the format in Annex 3.
42. RRIs will submit their annual report in accordance with the deadline that the Secretariat has provided.
43. The annual report and workplan will be approved by the governing body of the RRI, prior to submission to the Secretariat.