

Report and Decisions of the 63rd Meeting of the Standing Committee

Tuesday 4 June 2024

10:00 – 13:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 1: Opening statements

1. Opening statements were made by:
 - Dr Xia Jun, Chair of the Standing Committee;
 - Mr James Dalton, Global Head Water and Wetlands, IUCN;
 - Mr Stuart Orr, Freshwater Practice Leader, WWF, on behalf of the six International Organization Partners (IOPs); and
 - Dr Musonda Mumba, Secretary General of the Convention.
2. Interventions were made by Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Zimbabwe.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the provisional agenda

3. The Chair of the Standing Committee introduced the provisional agenda in document SC63 Doc.2.
4. A Standing Committee member suggested including two additional items under item 28 “Any other business” to address the process for reviewing the Rules of Procedure and to present a proposal for a possible draft resolution for consideration at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP15). The Chair of the Standing Committee responded that under the current agenda, the first additional item could be discussed under agenda item 7.1, the report of the Management Working Group, and that the member could raise the second under “Any other business”.
5. Interventions were made by Colombia, Indonesia and Sweden.

Decision SC63-01: The Standing Committee adopted the provisional agenda in document SC63 Doc.2.

Agenda item 3: Adoption of the provisional working programme

6. The Chair of the Standing Committee introduced the provisional working programme in document SC63 Doc.3 Rev.1.
7. A Standing Committee member suggested two amendments to the provisional working programme, so that agenda item 26 on the dates for the 64th Meeting of the Standing

Committee (SC64) be discussed before agenda item 21.3 on the process for preparation and review of draft resolutions, and that agenda item 19 on the report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) be discussed prior to agenda item 11 on the report of the Strategic Plan Working Group. The Chair of the Standing Committee noted that agenda items 21.3 and 11 could include discussions to reflect the concerns raised, enabling the adoption of the provisional working programme as published.

8. Interventions were made by Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Panama, Sweden, Switzerland and the Chair of the STRP.

Decision SC63-02: The Standing Committee adopted the provisional working programme in document SC63 Doc.3 Rev.1.

Agenda item 4: Admission of observers

9. The Secretariat outlined the key paragraphs of document SC63 Doc.4.
10. In addition to bodies or agencies that have already been approved to be represented by observers at previous meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, the following organizations in paragraph 6 of the document were approved as new observer organizations:

Bodies or agencies seeking approval which have met the criteria included:

- Coalition Climat pour la Biodiversité et le Développement
- Fair Carbon Association
- New World Hope
- Observatoire Indépendant des Tourbières

Decision SC63-03: The Standing Committee admitted the observers listed in paragraph 6 of document SC63 Doc.4.

Agenda item 5: Report of the Executive Team and the Chair of the Standing Committee

11. The Chair of the Standing Committee presented document SC63 Doc.5 and provided information on the meeting of the Executive Team on 2 June 2024.

Decision SC63-04: The Standing Committee took note of the Report of the Executive Team and Chair of the Standing Committee published as document SC63 Doc.5.

Agenda item 6: Report of the Secretary General

12. The Secretary General presented her report contained in document SC63 Doc.6.
13. Standing Committee members thanked the Secretary General and the Secretariat for their work in supporting the implementation of the Convention and in increasing its visibility. One member underlined the importance of resource mobilization and encouraged Contracting Parties to engage with the Secretariat regarding outstanding contributions.
14. One Standing Committee member expressed that Contracting Parties from the Americas region were taken aback by the departure of the former Senior Advisor, that the sentiment of the Parties was that the work carried out by the former Senior Advisor as regards the support

provided to Parties was of a very high standard, and requested further information regarding the circumstances of her departure, seeing as it did not correspond with the Parties' view of her work. The Secretary General responded that Human Resources matters are confidential under IUCN policy but offered to carry out a bilateral meeting on the matter. The Standing Committee member further requested additional information on the recruitment of a Senior Advisor for the Americas region.

15. Interventions were made by China, Colombia, Georgia, Madagascar, Mexico, Rwanda and Switzerland.

Decision SC63-05: The Standing Committee took note of the Report of the Secretary General published as document SC63 Doc.6.

Agenda item 26: Dates of the 64th meeting of the Standing Committee

16. The Secretariat introduced the requirements for the dates of SC64, noting it should take place six months before COP15 in accordance with Resolution XIV.2, and that draft resolutions should be submitted 60 days in advance of SC64 in accordance with Rule 5.1. The Secretariat proposed that the SC64 take place either from 13 to 17 January or from 20 to 24 January 2025.
17. The Chair of the Standing Committee recalled the recommendation of the Management Working Group to hold SC64 from 20 to 24 January 2025.

Decision SC63-06: The Standing Committee decided to hold SC64 from 20 to 24 January 2025 in Gland, Switzerland.

Agenda item 7.1: Report of the Management Working Group: Report on the activities of the Management Working Group

18. The Chair of the Standing Committee, as Chair of the Management Working Group, presented the report of the Management Working Group as contained in document SC63 Doc.7.1 and an oral overview of the meeting of the Working Group of 3 June 2024. He introduced the recommendation of the Management Working Group to repeal Decision SC52-11 which calls for the Management Working Group to review all new cooperation agreements, and replace it with a new decision that delegates to the Secretary General the authority to determine when an agreement with a new body is appropriate, following the guidance found within document SC54 Doc.16.Rev.1.

Decision SC63-07: The Standing Committee took note of the report on the activities of the Management Working Group as found in document SC63 Doc.7.1.

Decision SC63-08: The Standing Committee authorized the Secretary General of the Convention to enter into new cooperation agreements with organizations that meet the criteria found in SC54 Doc.16.Rev.1. Further, the Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to include this instruction in the draft resolution on synergies for consideration by COP15. This decision repeals Decision SC52-11.

Agenda item 7.2: Report of the Management Working Group: Report on the process for recruiting a new Secretary General

19. Switzerland described the process which followed the request by the Standing Committee to the Management Working Group to draft a resolution to guide the process on recruiting a new Secretary General. Switzerland noted two options for the formalization of the guidance: developing a draft resolution for consideration at COP15; or preparing a draft decision for SC63; and added that the Management Working Group favoured a decision by the Standing Committee, for flexibility.
20. Several Contracting Parties favoured developing a draft resolution. They further stressed the need for inclusivity and transparency, adequate time for regional consultations, and geographical balance and gender equality in future appointments to the position of Secretary General.
21. Several Parties favoured a Standing Committee decision, emphasizing the need for flexibility. They underlined the importance of confidentiality for a successful recruitment process. Some noted opposition to geographical rotation, stressing the need to select the best candidate.
22. The Chair of the Standing Committee established a contact group for interested Contracting Parties to further express their views, encouraging them to work collaboratively and collectively in a spirit of compromise to find a way forward.
23. Interventions were made by Algeria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Georgia, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Mexico, Rwanda, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States of America.

15:00 – 18:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 11: Report of the Strategic Plan Working Group

24. Brazil, as the Co-Chair of the Strategic Plan Working Group, presented the report of the Working Group, as contained in document SC63 Doc.11. Brazil reported on the non-paper draft of the Fifth Strategic Plan (SP5) developed by the Co-Chairs, and reported that the Working Group was currently focused on reaching consensus on the goals for SP5, highlighting that the Working Group had reached consensus on three goals. Noting that the Working Group would meet again on 5 June 2024, he suggested postponing discussions to take into account the outcomes of that meeting.
25. Contracting Parties thanked the Working Group for progress made and highlighted the need for alignment of the Strategic Plan with projects of the IOPs; for improved fundraising; for harmonizing of the Strategic Plan's goals with corresponding targets and ensuring they are not overlapping; for the goals and targets to be clear and assessable; and for the recognition of the importance of conservation efforts beyond Wetlands of International Importance.
26. The Chair of the STRP highlighted relevant advice by the STRP, contained in paragraphs 11, 13 and 15 of his report to Standing Committee (document SC63 Doc.19), noting that the development of SP5 is a high-priority task for the STRP.

27. The Chair of the Standing Committee highlighted potential for considerable progress during SC63 and noted that the agenda item will be revisited in plenary following the meeting of the Working Group on Wednesday.
28. Interventions were made by Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kenya on behalf of the Contracting Parties of the Africa region, and Sweden.

Decision SC63-09: The Standing Committee took note of the Report of the Strategic Plan Working Group published as document SC63 Doc.11.

Agenda item 12: Report of the Working Group on Institutional Strengthening
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29. South Africa and the United States of America, as Co-Chairs of the Working Group on Institutional Strengthening, presented the report of the Working Group contained in document SC63 Doc.12. They summarized key tasks accomplished by the Working Group during its five meetings, highlighting the synthesis report and the preparation of a “bridging document”, allowing in-depth discussions on challenges related to institutional strengthening of the Convention, and summarizing future steps towards developing a draft resolution for consideration by the Standing Committee at SC64.
30. Contracting Parties thanked the Working Group for its diligent work; highlighted challenges currently facing the Secretariat related to administrative arrangements, human resources and visibility, as well as options to address them, and implications of the options identified in terms of their benefits in dealing with specific root causes; and stressed that the outcomes will enable a better common understanding as a basis for future discussions.
31. Interventions were made by Colombia, and Zimbabwe on behalf of the Contracting Parties of the Africa region.

Decision SC63-10: The Standing Committee took note of the Report of the Working Group on Institutional Strengthening and approved the next steps proposed by the Working Group.

Agenda item 21.1: Preparation of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP15): Report of the Secretariat on COP15
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32. The Secretariat presented its report on COP15, contained in document SC63 Doc.21.1. The Secretariat also presented Zimbabwe’s proposed theme for COP15 “Protecting wetlands for our common future”, noting that it had been endorsed by both the Subgroup on COP15 and the Management Working Group, and a logo, which had been endorsed by the Subgroup on COP15.
33. Zimbabwe, as COP15 host, elaborated on the theme and logo, highlighting and explaining elements of its iconography; the water and bird motif; the circular frame; and the colour palette.
34. Contracting Parties asked for clarifications on the theme’s conceptual underpinnings to assist their preparations for COP15; stressed the need for a strong message on protecting wetlands; and asked questions on the logo’s translation and on logistics.
35. Interventions were made by Germany, Switzerland, the United States of America, and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust.

Decision SC63-11: The Standing Committee took note of the Report of the Secretariat on COP15 as found in document SC63 Doc.21.1, including the indicative timeline of events and deadlines leading up to COP15, and approved the proposed theme and logo for COP15.

Agenda item 21.2: Preparation of COP15: Report of the Subgroup on COP15

36. Zimbabwe presented an oral report on preparations for hosting COP15. Zimbabwe highlighted that a host agreement has been signed and outlined preparations, including securing the conference venue; arranging transport for delegates, blocking hotel rooms, developing an event website; organizing field visits; and hosting a high-level segment. The Chair of the Standing Committee thanked Zimbabwe and the Secretariat for their efforts in preparing COP15.

Decision SC63-12: The Standing Committee took note of the report presented by the Chair of the Subgroup on COP15.

Agenda item 21.3: Preparation of COP15: Proposal of the Secretariat on the process for preparation and review of draft resolutions

37. The Secretariat outlined the proposed process for the preparation and review of draft resolutions for COP15 as presented in document SC63 Doc. 21.3, highlighting the deadline for submission of draft resolutions of 20 November 2024, 60 days in advance of SC64.
38. A Standing Committee member suggested minor amendments to the guidance note on preparation of submissions for draft resolutions, contained in Annex 1 of the same document, to add a section on resolutions to be repealed or revised; to provide a fuller breakdown of costs, differentiating between core or non-core funding; and to strengthen the wording on the ten-page limit. The Chair noted that these edits will be made in the guidance before it is shared.
39. Interventions were made by Canada and Sweden.

Decision SC63-13: The Standing Committee:

- a. **noted the indicative timeline for events related to the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP15), in paragraph 3 of document SC63 Doc. 21.3;**
- b. **instructed the Secretariat to share with Contracting Parties the guidance for the preparation of draft resolutions for COP15, as presented in Annex 1 and amended in plenary, with deadlines for submission updated to reflect the dates decided for the Committee's 64th meeting (SC64);**
- c. **approved the guidance on the Secretariat's role in engaging with Contracting Parties in preparing draft resolutions, and the processes for doing so both before and after SC64, as proposed in paragraphs 7 to 10;**
- d. **instructed the Secretariat to follow for COP15 the process for review of draft resolutions applied at COP14, applying logistical refinements as appropriate.**

Agenda item 21.4: Preparation of COP15: Proposal of the Secretariat on the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards

40. The Secretariat presented the proposed process for administering the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards scheme as contained in document SC63 Doc.21.4. The Secretariat

highlighted three proposed award categories, the Award for Young Wetland Champions; the Award for Science; and the Indigenous Peoples Conservation and Wise Use Award.

41. One member suggested replacing the Award for Science with the Award for Innovation, to open it to a wider set of potential candidates, and adding “local communities” to the Indigenous Peoples Conservation and Wise Use Award. The Chair reminded Contracting Parties about the six potential award categories defined by Resolution XIV.9, paragraph 8.

Decision SC63-14: The Standing Committee noted the estimated budget, funding requirements and timeline for the Award nomination process and decided that awards will be presented in the following categories: the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award for Young Wetland Champions, the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award for Innovation, and the Ramsar Wetland Indigenous Peoples Conservation and Wise Use Award.

Agenda item 13.1: Report of the Secretariat on implementation of Resolution XIV.3: Strategy for communication with Contracting Parties (Resolution XIV.3 paragraph 11)

42. The Secretariat presented its report on implementation of Resolution XIV.3, contained in document SC63 Doc.13.1. The Secretariat noted that Resolution XIV.3, among other things, instructs the Secretariat to improve its communications approach towards Contracting Parties and to submit an updated strategy for communications with Parties for consideration at SC63. It added that the updated strategy, which is annexed to document SC63 Doc.13.1, outlines an improved communications approach organized in three categories: information sharing; official communications and virtual meeting management; and capacity building. The Secretariat highlighted that it will apply the United Nations guidelines for gender-inclusive language in its communications and stressed that the plan can be implemented with currently available resources.
43. Parties expressed appreciation for the Secretariat’s improved communications approach; encouraged it to further promote effectiveness and efficiency through enhanced communication; and highlighted the importance of capacity-building activities.
44. Interventions were made by Indonesia, Japan and Sweden.

Decision SC63-15: The Standing Committee endorsed the proposed plan in SC63 Doc.13.1 for communication with Contracting Parties and noted that the Secretariat will apply the United Nations guidelines for gender-inclusive language in its communications.

Agenda item 13.2: Report of the Secretariat on implementation of Resolution XIV.3: Enhancing intersessional collaboration between Contracting Parties (follow-up to Standing Committee Decision SC62-18)

45. The Secretariat introduced its report on enhancing intersessional collaboration between Contracting Parties. The Secretariat highlighted that Decision SC62-18 instructed the Secretariat to follow an approach which facilitates communication through conventional means such as email, phone calls, and video meetings as well as to use SharePoint to enable Parties to submit and provide comments on documents, which are visible and accessible to all members of a defined group. The Secretariat further noted that the same Decision instructed the Secretariat to present a plan to SC63 on enhanced intersessional collaboration, which is contained in document SC63 Doc.13.2.

46. Some Contracting Parties suggested amendments, stressing that virtual tools and modalities can be useful but should not replace in-person negotiations, modify existing rights and obligations of Contracting Parties, or set a precedent for future processes under the Convention.
47. The Chair of the Standing Committee noted that the amendments would be included in a revised document.
48. One Contracting Party suggested establishing a virtual platform for increased visibility of the procedure for designating Wetlands of International Importance.
49. Interventions were made by Brazil, Colombia and Indonesia.

Decision SC63-16: The Standing Committee endorsed the tools and approach proposed in SC63 Doc.13.2 Rev.1 for enhancing intersessional collaboration between Contracting Parties.

Wednesday 5 June 2024

10:00 – 13:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 8: Report of the Secretariat on the implementation of the Decisions of the Standing Committee

50. The Secretariat reported on its follow-up on Decision SC62-21 in which the Standing Committee *“agreed to the three-step process outlined in paragraph 23 of document SC62 Doc.15 for maintaining the list of current Decisions of the Standing Committee”*, and presented key elements of document SC63 Doc.8, which provides a recommended procedure for recording and maintaining the Decisions of the Standing Committee. It was noted that 1,072 Decisions from SC24 through SC62 of the Standing Committee have been reviewed, of which 1,047 Decisions have been implemented; 12 Decisions are outstanding from SC62; and 13 Decisions are outstanding from previous meetings. The Secretariat added that two lists have been created, one listing implemented Decisions compiled in a document uploaded to the Convention’s website, and the other listing outstanding Decisions contained in Annex 1 of document SC63 Doc.8.

Decision SC63-17: The Standing Committee took note of the report prepared by the Secretariat and confirmed that the two lists of Decisions from SC24 to SC62 found at <https://www.ramsar.org/document/list-standing-committee-decisions-which-have-been-implemented-are-no-longer-effect> and at Annex 1 of document SC63 Doc.8 fulfil the first and second steps of the process approved in Decision SC62-21.

Decision SC63-18: The Standing Committee decided that the Decisions identified as “outstanding” will be presented at future meetings of the Standing Committee, as described in paragraph 4 of document SC63 Doc.8, and that Decisions identified as “implemented” will not be presented at future Standing Committee meetings. The Standing Committee recommended that, where appropriate, “outstanding” Decisions be incorporated into future Resolutions such that they can then be considered “implemented” and removed from the list of “outstanding” Decisions.

Agenda item 16: Review and consolidation of current Resolutions

51. The Secretariat introduced document SC63 Doc.16.1 and reminded Parties of the process for consolidation which was agreed to in Resolution XIV.5 on *Review of Resolutions and Recommendations of the Conference of the Contracting Parties*. It then presented the present four draft consolidations of Resolutions for consideration of the Standing Committee, published as documents SC63 Doc.16.2 through 16.5. The Secretariat noted that the Standing Committee is invited to ensure that the consolidation of Resolutions and Recommendations has been correctly done; that nothing new has been introduced; and that there are no changes in substance, so that the consolidated text effectively reflects what has already been agreed by the Conference of the Parties and remains valid.
52. A Standing Committee member suggested amendments, proposing the suggested changes be reflected in a Rev.1 document. Several Contracting Parties highlighted their preference for reviewing the suggested changes before a Rev.1 document is drafted.
53. The Chair of the Standing Committee noted that the consolidation process does not allow amendments to the text. The Chair invited the Party to submit its suggested changes to the Secretariat, which will make the text available through information documents for review by the Standing Committee, and suggested that the agenda item be revisited on Thursday.
54. Interventions were made by Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Sweden and Switzerland.

Agenda item 25: Report of the Secretariat on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives

55. The Secretariat introduced its report on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs), contained in document SC63 Doc.25. The Secretariat drew attention to: the submission of annual reports of RRIs, noting that 17 out of 21 endorsed RRIs have submitted their annual reports for 2023-2024, as summarized in Annex 1 of the document; and the proposal on the establishment of the Danube WILDisland initiative as an RRI, which had been evaluated and met the criteria for RRIs in Resolution XIV.7 and in the Operational Guidelines for RRIs. The Secretariat invited members of the Standing Committee to consider the Danube WILDisland RRI for endorsement and the proposed allocation of CHF 29,000 from the 2024 core budget line D "Support to Regional Initiatives" for its 2024 activities.
56. A Contracting Party, on behalf of 12 Parties from Southern Africa, highlighted work to operationalize the Southern African Ramsar Regional Initiative (SARRI). The Party drew attention to a regional meeting in Réunion from 20 to 21 May 2024 and the decision of ministers responsible for the environment, natural resources and tourism of the member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on a mechanism to protect wetlands at the regional level and institutionalize SARRI. The Party underscored the need for: synergies to effectively implement the Convention on Wetlands; effective regional coordination, and sharing of expertise, data and knowledge; inclusivity and transparency in governance; strengthening of the participation of local communities and other stakeholders; and a resource mobilization strategy for effective implementation. At that meeting a declaration signed by the coordinator of SARRI representing the Contracting Parties, and witnessed by the representatives of SADC and the Convention Secretariat, was read out in its entirety.
57. Other Contracting Parties welcomed the new RRI of the Danube WILDisland initiative and supported the budget allocation, noting that it is a great example of international cooperation,

and suggesting that experiences and lessons learned be shared with a view to future collaboration.

58. Two Contracting Parties requested clarifications on challenges identified in RRI annual reports related to lack of coordination due to a rotating coordination scheme. The Secretariat noted that RRIs follow different approaches, with some incorporating a rotating mechanism and others working through a steering committee with a rotating chair.
59. Interventions were made by Australia, Belgium, Georgia, Madagascar, Panama and Sweden.

Decision SC63-19: The Standing Committee:

- a. **took note of the annual reports submitted by the Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) for 2023 in accordance with Resolution XIV.7 on Ramsar Regional Initiatives;**
- b. **approved 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 approved the allocation of start-up funding to the Danube WILDIsland RRI from the 2024 core budget line D “Support to Regional Initiatives” proposed in document SC63 Doc.9.1 in the amount of CHF 29,000.**

Agenda item 15: Enhancing the Convention’s visibility and synergies in partnership with multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions
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60. The Secretariat introduced document SC63 Doc.15, which includes a report on progress on work pursuant to paragraph 21 of Resolution XIV.6. The Secretariat highlighted that the report covers the main activities undertaken since SC62 and the results achieved, structured in thematic clusters that address biodiversity, climate change, pollution, water, sustainable development, international financial institutions and collaboration with international partners.
61. Contracting Parties expressed appreciation for the efforts of the Secretariat to strengthen synergies and the visibility of the Convention. They highlighted cooperation and encouraged further synergies with: the Convention on Biological Diversity, including towards effective implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF); the Bern Process, which addresses synergies between biodiversity-related Conventions in implementing the KM-GBF; the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes; the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats; the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement; and the World Water Forum. They encouraged further cooperation with relevant regional intergovernmental organizations, such as the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization; with the scientific bodies of Conventions; in the implementation of national strategic plans on biodiversity, climate change and pollution; and on data collection and relevant methodologies.
62. Two Parties noted the importance of ensuring that references to other Conventions in reports prepared by the Secretariat use the language agreed by Parties to those Conventions.
63. A Contracting Party stressed the need to ensure that wetlands are accurately assessed for their ability to mitigate climate change, and stated that it planned to submit a draft resolution for COP15 to introduce a tool for rapid assessment of the carbon stored in wetlands.
64. Interventions were made by: Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, Czechia, Finland, Georgia, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland, the United States of America, Zimbabwe,

the Chair of the STRP, the Secretariat of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, and Wetlands International.

Decision SC63-20: The Standing Committee took note of the progress in implementing Resolution XIV.6 on *Enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions.*

Agenda item 14: Work plan of the Secretariat for 2024

65. The Secretariat presented the work plan of the Secretariat for 2024, contained in document SC63 Doc.14. It noted that the plan is structured according to the Secretariat's seven core functions: governing and subsidiary body and meeting services; administration, human and financial resources; implementation support; scientific and technical service; representation, policy, engagement, and international cooperation; resource mobilization; and outreach and strategic engagement.

Decision SC63-21: The Standing Committee took note of and approved the Secretariat's annual work plan for 2024.

Thursday 6 June 2024

10:00 – 13:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 7.2: Report of the Management Working Group: Report on the process for recruiting a new Secretary General (continued)

66. Switzerland reported to the Standing Committee on the deliberations of the contact group on the process for recruiting a new Secretary General, which had met on 5 June from 13.45 to 15.00. It highlighted that past members of the recruitment committee, participating in the contact group session, had insisted on the importance of confidentiality. It added that the contact group had considered a proposal by one Standing Committee member, but was not able to finish its work since no decision could be reached for one of the options outlined in document SC63 Doc.7.2. The Chair of the Standing Committee noted that the contact group would continue its deliberations on 6 June.

Agenda item 16: Review and consolidation of current Resolutions (continued)

67. The Secretariat introduced SC63 Inf.6, outlining changes suggested by one Standing Committee member to the draft consolidation of Resolutions on water, water-related and water-management-related matters contained in document SC63 Doc.16.4. It noted the proposed deletions of paragraph 2,3 and 4 of Resolution X.19 and highlighted that deletion of paragraph 3 would remove reference to the Annex of the same Resolution, and so recommended that it be retained. It added that a fourth edit suggests moving paragraph 13 of Resolution IX.3 to the preambular text.

68. Some Standing Committee members suggested adding a footnote providing context to clarify that the text presents a consolidation of Resolutions and not a new Resolution. One member noted that moving text from the operative part to the preambular part is beyond the scope of the consolidation process. Several Contracting Parties supported deletion of paragraphs 2 and 4 and retaining paragraph 3.

69. The Secretariat introduced SC63 Inf.5, highlighting changes suggested by one Standing Committee member to the draft consolidation of Resolutions on communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness (CEPA) contained in SC63 Doc.16.3. It noted the proposed retention of paragraphs 13 and 14 of Resolution XIV.8 which had been proposed for deletion in the draft consolidation.
70. A Standing Committee member noted that deletion of paragraph 13, which “instructs the Convention Secretariat to assign an additional Communication Officer to underpin implementation of the new approach, within existing resources”, would not reflect agreement from COP14, highlighting the ongoing importance of this instruction and noting deletion of this paragraph would not comply with the mandate of consolidation. Some Contracting Parties expressed their preference for deletion noting the instruction would be time-bound to the triennium between COP14 and COP15 and suggesting such instruction be better suited in a Resolution on budgetary matters.
71. Interventions were made by Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Madagascar, Sweden and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust.

Decision SC63-22: The Standing Committee:

- a. **approved the four draft consolidated resolutions found in documents SC63 Doc.16.2, SC63 Doc.16.3, SC63 Doc.16.4 as amended in line with the Committee’s discussion, and SC63 Doc.16.5;**
- b. **instructed the Secretariat to submit the draft consolidated resolutions in documents SC63 Doc.16.2, SC63 Doc.16.4 as amended, and SC63 Doc.16.5 for consideration and adoption by the Conference of the Parties at its 15th meeting; and**
- c. **noted that the views of Contracting Parties are reflected in the report of SC63.**

The Committee’s Decision regarding the draft consolidated resolution in document SC63 Doc.16.3 is included in Decision SC63-24.

Agenda item 17.1: Communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness (CEPA): Report of the Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel

72. Gabon, as Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel, provided an overview of the work carried out since SC62, focusing on activities related to: strengthening the network of CEPA Focal Points and updating relevant information; capacity building; providing strategic guidance on the implementation of the campaign for World Wetlands Day 2024; and conducting a survey to inform the development of CEPA resources. Gabon drew attention to the proposal to refresh the Convention’s logo and presented a proposed refreshed logo, the adoption of which was recommended by the CEPA Oversight Panel.
73. Austria offered background information on the process for a refreshed logo, noting that the suggestion is to refresh, adjust, and modernize the logo rather than change it. Austria stressed that it is up to Standing Committee members to decide whether the proposed refreshed logo should be adopted or discussions on the development of a new logo should continue.
74. A Contracting Party, supported by others, suggested engaging youth in a competition on the new logo, instigating their further engagement with the Convention. They stressed the need to be open-minded and comfortable with change, emphasizing that the logo can be modernized while keeping some continuity to reflect the evolution of the Convention. A Contracting Party suggested including an element on biodiversity in the new logo. Some

Contracting Parties supported maintaining the current logo, noting it is widely recognized, and emphasized the need for continuity. They highlighted the need to link the logo with a wide-ranging, comprehensive communication strategy and consider budgetary implications. Delegates added that considering the logo after COP15 could support additional visibility for the technical and scientific work under the Convention and suggested taking relevant discussions forward under the CEPA work plan.

75. The Secretariat offered background information on the development of the current logo and its approval through Standing Committee SC21-4, noting that the precedent has been that the Standing Committee is the body responsible to approve the logo.
76. Interventions were made by Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Czechia, Georgia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, the Chair of the STRP and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust.

Decision SC63-23: The Standing Committee took note of the Report of the CEPA Oversight Panel contained in document SC63 Doc.17.1 and instructed the Panel to continue discussion on the need and value of a new logo, including budget considerations, in consultation with interested Parties and the Secretariat, and to report on progress to SC67.

Agenda item 17.2: CEPA: Report of the Secretariat on the proposed future operations of the CEPA Oversight Panel, in accordance with Resolution XIV.8

77. The Secretariat presented the Report on the proposed future operations of the CEPA Oversight Panel, in accordance with Resolution XIV.8, as found in document SC63 Doc 17.2, noting that the proposed plan is contained in Annex 1 of the document. The Secretariat highlighted relevant elements, which include: the composition of the panel; the nomination procedure; and the modus operandi of the panel. Noting that Resolution XIV.8 calls for a newly established CEPA Oversight Panel to convene for the first time at the conclusion of the COP at which it has been established, the Secretariat discussed associated challenges and suggested to hold the first meeting of the Panel within two months of the conclusion of the COP.
78. Contracting Parties expressed appreciation for the work. Some Contracting Parties emphasized gaps in the nomination procedure, on: who has the power to nominate representatives; what are the relevant qualifications and selection criteria in cases of multiple nominees; and the role of the Standing Committee, opining that it should ensure a fair and transparent process but have a lesser role in the nomination process. Another Contracting Party stressed that it is up to the Standing Committee to ensure the best composition for the CEPA Oversight Panel. Others expressed support for the Secretariat's proposal. A delegate noted that more work would be useful to ensure the nomination procedure results in a good composition of the Panel and to align CEPA-related work with the Strategic Plan once it is finalized.
79. The Secretariat noted that Resolution XIV.8 includes specific instructions on the nomination procedure but also contains gaps, stressing that additional clarity would be beneficial on the selection and decision-making processes regarding membership.
80. Contracting Parties discussed references to the representation of Indigenous Peoples. Some suggested adding references to local communities, to be used in conjunction. Others opposed,

noting that Indigenous Peoples are a distinct group and need to be represented, and pointing to the relevant criteria in Resolution XIV.8.

81. Interventions were made by Belgium, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, Colombia, Georgia, Indonesia, Sweden and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust.

Decision SC63-24: The Standing Committee approved the proposal of the Secretariat on the future operations of the CEPA Oversight Panel, and instructed the Secretariat to prepare a draft resolution for consideration at SC64 and submission to the Conference of the Contracting Parties at COP15, reflecting the consolidation on Recommendations and Resolutions on CEPA submitted in Document SC63 Doc.16.3 and approved through Decision SC63-22, and the views of the Standing Committee on the process and timeline for nominating the Panel for the 2025-2028 triennium. The Standing Committee decided that the draft consolidated resolution on CEPA presented in Document SC63 Doc.16.3 would not be forwarded to COP15.

Agenda item 17.3: CEPA: Report of the Secretariat on World Wetlands Day 2024

82. The Secretariat presented its report on World Wetlands Day 2024 contained in document SC63 Doc.17.3 Rev.1, highlighting that 1,874 events in 81 countries across the world had been reported, and a potential social media outreach to 2.5 billion users on 2 February 2024. It noted lessons from previous years include the added value of strong partnerships with other international organizations and a timely dissemination of information materials.
83. Contracting Parties thanked the Secretariat for its successful engagement in World Wetlands Day 2024, highlighting the usefulness of the information materials, and suggesting to make reports of the Secretariat on World Wetlands Day from previous years accessible. Some Parties noted challenges with registering their events in the Secretariat's record.
84. Interventions were made by France, Georgia, Madagascar, Zimbabwe and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust.

Decision SC63-25: The Standing Committee took note of the Report of the Secretariat on World Wetlands Day 2024 as presented in document SC63 Doc 17.3 Rev.1.

Agenda item 17.4: CEPA: World Wetlands Day themes for 2025, 2026 and 2027

85. The Secretariat introduced SC63 Doc.17.4, presenting the proposed themes for World Wetlands Day 2025 "Protecting wetlands for our common future", 2026 "Wetlands for sustainable cities" and 2027 "Wetlands and Indigenous knowledge: Preserving cultural heritage". It highlighted the intended alignment of the proposed World Wetlands Day theme for 2025 with the COP15 theme, and noted other suggested themes for eventual consideration: "Wetlands and sustainable agriculture" and "Connected wetlands: From the mountains to the sea".
86. Contracting Parties suggested: replacing "preserving" by "celebrating" and replacing "Indigenous" by "traditional" in the proposed theme for 2027, to set a positive tone and achieve inclusivity with a wider term; interchanging the proposed themes for 2026 and 2027 for better alignment with the Special Report on Climate Change and Cities by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, anticipated for 2027; avoiding lengthy themes and repetition from previous years; and paying attention to translation challenges.

87. Interventions were made by Australia, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, China, Gabon, Georgia, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Sweden, the China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust.

Decision SC63-26: The Standing Committee decided on the following World Wetland Day themes:

2025 – Protecting wetlands for our common future

2026 – Wetlands and traditional knowledge: Celebrating cultural heritage

2027 – Wetlands for sustainable cities

15:00 – 18:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 10: Urgent challenges to the wise use of wetlands to receive enhanced attention:
Update on wetland inventories

88. The Secretariat introduced the update on wetland inventories as found in document SC63 Doc.10, describing its efforts to consolidate a support mechanism for Contracting Parties in the completion of national wetland inventories (NWIs). The Secretariat highlighted that it had conducted in-depth interviews with 13 Contracting Parties to identify specific needs and key constraints that they face in developing NWIs, noting that findings are contained in information document SC63 Inf.2. The Secretariat highlighted needs identified for additional guidance and focused on: a three-year programme for capacity building; implementation support; and funding requirements for 2025-2028, contained in Table 1 of document SC63 Doc.10, stressing that they are broad estimates that require further refinement.
89. Contracting Parties expressed appreciation for the activities and progress made. They emphasized the importance of such a support mechanism, with a Party announcing it would fund the activity, while inviting others to do the same. They recognized that data and information are fundamental to advance wetland issues under the Convention and other agendas, such as the KM-GBF and Sustainable Development Goal 6. A Party suggested developing additional guidance on how to design NWIs more easily and effectively, including using technological advances, and on the potential of NWIs to inform carbon storage and emissions, and feed into nationally determined contributions under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the attribution of carbon credits.
90. The Chair of the STRP noted that relevant STRP tasks include wetland mapping and inventories to catalyse greater use of methodologies for carbon assessments as well as inventories of small wetland systems.
91. Interventions were made by Belgium, Burkina Faso, Canada, Switzerland and the Chair of the STRP.

Decision SC63-27: The Standing Committee noted the progress of the Secretariat to provide a support mechanism to Contracting Parties in completing national wetland inventories and requested the Secretariat to pursue fundraising activities to amplify the development of the proposed mechanism.

Agenda item 9.1: Financial and budgetary matters: Report on financial matters for 2023 and 2024

92. The Chair of the Subgroup on Finance presented the report of the Subgroup's meeting contained in document SC63 Com.1. The Subgroup had reviewed document SC63 Doc.9.1, focusing on: audited financial statements; core budget results; the status of core funding and

non-core contributions; carrying forward of pre-committing funds; allocation of funds to eligible RRI; the surplus balance; and the financial reports for upcoming fiscal years as they relate to the preparation of materials for SC64 and SC65. The Chair of the Subgroup on Finance stressed that it is standard practice to address surplus funds at the COP and highlighted a virtual intersessional meeting of the Subgroup in early December 2024, inviting proposals from Parties for the use of surplus funds by October 2024. The Chair of the Subgroup also highlighted that the Secretariat had provided information to the Subgroup on the core budget and will present proposals on an increased core budget for consideration at SC64.

93. Contracting Parties expressed appreciation to the Subgroup on Finance and the Secretariat for the comprehensive report. A Party suggested considering surplus funds for the development of NWIs. Another suggested utilizing them for technological improvements for the Secretariat and further administrative aspects. A further Party suggested that the budget be addressed at SC64, taking into account the draft resolutions to be considered at that meeting. A Party queried how SC64 will deal with financial and budgetary matters given that the audit will not have been finalized. The Secretariat noted that the audit is expected to take place in March or April 2025 with audited financial statements presented to SC65 for approval.
94. Interventions were made by Georgia, Mexico, Sweden and Switzerland.

Decision SC63-28: The Standing Committee:

- i. **accepted the 2023 audited financial statements as of 31 December 2023;**
- ii. **noted the core budget results for 2023;**
- iii. **noted the status of the non-core balances and voluntary contributions for 2023;**
- iv. **approved the carry-forward of the pre-committed and unspent funds in amount of CHF 1,232,000 from 2023 to 2024, as included in column C of the table in Annex 1 Core Budget 2024 of document SC63 Com.1;**
- v. **approved the allocation of CHF 29,000 from the core budget to the Danube WILDIsland Ramsar Regional Initiative for activities in 2024, as described in paragraph 23 of document SC63 Doc.9.1;**
- vi. **noted the surplus balances at the end of 2023; and**
- vii. **noted the information regarding the financial reports for 2024 and 2025 and regarding the invoices for 2025, as described in paragraphs 26 and 27 of document SC63 Doc. 9.1.**

Agenda item 9.2: Financial and budgetary matters: Status of annual contributions
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95. The Chair of the Subgroup on Finance reported on the Subgroup's review of document SC63 Doc.9.2, and reported that the Subgroup had noted the issues of outstanding contributions; reviewed actions taken to continue to encourage payment of annual contributions; and taken note of the status of the African voluntary contributions.
96. Contracting Parties expressed appreciation for the report, highlighting the need for Parties to stay informed on their contributions, expressing concerns regarding those countries which are in arrears, and urging Parties to provide their annual contributions.
97. Interventions were made by Georgia, Mexico, Sweden and Switzerland.

Decision SC63-29: The Standing Committee:

- i. **took note of the status of annual contributions;**

- ii. **noted the actions listed in paragraphs 12 and 13 of document SC62 Doc.9.2 on group confirmation of outstanding contributions as part of the audit process;**
- iii. **noted the actions listed in paragraphs 15, 17, 18 and 19 of the same document to continue encouraging the payment of annual contributions by the Contracting Parties;**
- iv. **noted the changes in annual contributions receivable and in the annual provision against contributions receivable; and**
- v. **noted the status of the voluntary contributions received from the Contracting Parties in the Africa region outlined in paragraph 22 of the same document.**

Agenda item 11: Report of the Strategic Plan Working Group (continued)
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- 98. The Co-Chairs of the Strategic Plan Working Group reported on progress, noting that the Group had held two additional sessions on 5 June. They noted that the Working Group agreed on 2025-2034 as the timeline for the fifth Strategic Plan, and on the ordering of the four goals. They highlighted that a rich discussion took place on Goal 4 and on targets under the goal on wise use, but that delegates were not able to agree on wording for this goal. They noted that text proposed on targets would be organized under the agreed goals for further discussions, with a view to further progress in planned virtual intersessional meetings.
- 99. Contracting Parties stressed the need to consider challenges and drivers under each goal and to work in a spirit of compromise; expressed concerns over slow progress and suggested further engagement and interaction between Parties and the experts involved in drafting the Strategic Plan; noted that Parties should be given an opportunity to revisit goals agreed at the Working Group, including providing comments on a zero draft; and urged that the latest version of the draft as discussed in the last meeting of the Working Group be shared.
- 100. The Co-Chairs of the Working Group provided the necessary clarifications, stressing that the Working Group is open to all Contracting Parties and urging further engagement, and suggesting working in a constructive way and not reopening agreed text as time is limited for the conclusion of the draft Strategic Plan.
- 101. The Chair of the Standing Committee stressed that the Strategic Plan is a very ambitious document, reflecting activities for the Convention and Contracting Parties over the next decade following its revision to cover the period from 2025 to 2034; and expressed his trust for a swift adoption at COP15, noting that time is limited.
- 102. Interventions were made by Belgium, China, Georgia, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Sweden.

Agenda item 19: Report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel on implementation of the STRP work plan
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- 103. The Chair of the STRP presented key elements of the Report on implementation of the STRP work plan in document SC63 Doc.19; highlighted documents submitted for SC63, recommendations for the consideration of SC63 arising from STRP26, and recent STRP outputs; and outlined the STRP's recommendation for a two-phase review of the Ramsar wetland classification system, consisting of an initial assessment to determine whether a comprehensive assessment is necessary, potentially followed by a full assessment. In addition, the Chair of the STRP introduced proposals for emerging issues for the STRP to focus on, including tools for wetland mapping and inventory; transformative change assessment for wise use of wetlands; synergies on development of indicators; advances in nature-based solutions to address climate change; and plastic pollution in wetlands.

104. Contracting Parties thanked the STRP for its work and provided comments on the proposed two-phase review of the Ramsar wetland classification system. Several Parties recommended the review take into account the variety of regional and national typologies and address potential technical and financial implications for transitioning to a new system. One Standing Committee member suggested amendments to phase one of the review process relating to the participation of focal points; the introduction of a timeline; and the potential preparation of a draft resolution in the last phase.
105. On potential emerging issues, Contracting Parties voiced support for: work on wetland mapping and inventory, noting the need for technological advances and clarity on related costs; work on synergies with other indicator systems; and advances in nature-based solutions to address climate change, with one Standing Committee member suggesting linkages between wetlands and climate change be dealt with comprehensively to avoid too narrow a focus on climate mitigation. One member suggested inclusion of the management of peatlands, especially in the context of ice melting, permafrost melting, and an increase in fire frequency.
106. Contracting Parties suggested to further include work on support for livelihoods of wetland communities and a review of wetland types, but to refrain from work on plastic pollution, noting that this topic is comprehensively dealt with in the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on plastic pollution. On transformative change, one Standing Committee member supported further work while another voiced concern over the reference to “rights of wetlands”, pointing at the variety of pathways to achieve transformative change.
107. Regarding the Global Wetlands Outlook (GWO), one Standing Committee member suggested focusing on the first envisaged part, the economic impacts of wetland loss. The Chair of the STRP responded that the adopted workplan of the STRP determines the focus for the upcoming GWO, both on the economic costs of restoration and required financing for wetland conservation.
108. Interventions were made by Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Georgia, Japan, Kenya, Sweden and the United States of America.

Decision SC63-30: The Standing Committee noted the Report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel as presented in SC63 Doc.19 and the comments made by Parties; requested the STRP to undertake scoping and planning for a review of the classification system of wetland type to be implemented as a high priority task in the 2025-2027 triennium; and requested the STRP, working with the Secretariat, to organize a consultation with the earth observation community on development of an initiative to foster dialogue, knowledge exchange and guidance for earth observation in support of wetland inventory, assessment, monitoring and conservation.

Agenda item 20: Technical proposal of the STRP on resourcing and implementing Waterbird Population Estimates
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109. The Chair of the STRP introduced the technical proposal presented in document SC63 Doc.20, which had been developed in response to Resolution XIV.18. The Chair of the STRP noted that the proposal highlights the urgent need to update waterbird population data to support the objectives of the Convention and highlighted the proposal to produce a sixth edition of the Waterbird Population Estimates by 2027 as a priority, and the recommendation to establish a global Waterbird Estimates Partnership to guide future updates, adding that financial

implications are presented in the document for both proposals. The Chair of the STRP concluded that, subject to resource mobilization, such a Partnership can be formally approved by COP15.

110. Contracting Parties thanked the STRP for the comprehensive proposal. They supported the production of the Waterbird Population Estimates, suggesting clarifying sources of funding and whether it would be covered by the core budget, and keeping the exercise in line with necessary competences. They further supported the establishment of the Partnership, noting the need to aggregate and analyse national data in a wider geographical context and stressing that Contracting Parties should have the option to consider potential partners. They emphasized the need for an analysis of financial implications for the entire work envisaged, and options for additional resources, such as voluntary contributions, and relevant advice by the Subgroup on Finance, as well as legal implications regarding providing core budget funds to finance the Partnership. Some expressed support for periodic reviews every nine years, with one Contracting Party suggesting updating current populations before expanding taxonomic coverage in line with the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals. They further discussed the use of alternative data sources, requesting the STRP to provide guidance or clarifications to the Secretariat for the application of alternative data sources listed as reliable and relevant in Resolution XIV.18.
111. A Contracting Party suggested that Parties should be able to provide comments on the modus operandi of the Partnership and launch it at COP15; requested itemized cost estimates for activities; and underlined the need for fixed periodic updates for their predictable application in other Convention activities.
112. Another Contracting Party suggested: establishing a work programme that determines the most pressing updates needed for various taxa and has a long-term perspective, including planning for when new data are required for other tasks; using updates as soon as analyses for specific taxa are completed, rather than through periodic publications; retiring Resolution VIII.38 and allocating resources strategically, planning updates in coordination with ongoing tasks and ensuring proper communication between different work tasks regarding the availability of fresh data; refraining from stating that the data is crucial for the follow-up of the fifth Strategic Plan since the latter has not been agreed; deleting reference (paragraph 55 f) to the work of the partnership directly contributing to the Strategic Plan for 2016-2024 either in a revised document or in future versions; providing information on potential partners for the Partnership as well as on the location of the secretariat for the Waterbird Population Estimates; including a budget line for the Waterbird Population Estimates in the budget draft resolution for COP15; and including more information in the draft resolutions on synergies and financing.
113. An IOP expressed readiness to provide in-kind support as well as support related to resource mobilization and coordination.
114. The Chair of the STRP noted Contracting Parties' suggestion for a periodic approach in review, noting that it is also the STRP's recommendation; suggested Contracting Parties provide feedback on additional guidance on alternative data sources; and noted that further discussions will be needed on the financial components of the proposal, working with the Subgroup on Finance and Contracting Parties and considering potential allocation of surplus funds to initiate work, adding that funds regarding the Partnership would only be required upon its establishment and not for ongoing work.

115. The Secretariat noted that, regarding alternative data sources, Resolution XIV.18 contains a clear set of parameters on procedures to be used until the waterbird population estimates are updated. The Secretariat stressed that its role lies primarily in looking at the completeness of data submitted and how the agreed processes are followed by Contracting Parties when they designate Sites, and less on validating data provided, underscoring challenges related to developing a comprehensive guide on which alternative sources pass the reliability test. The Secretariat further noted that brief ad-hoc guidance for Parties on this matter by the STRP would be helpful.
116. Interventions were made by Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Japan and Sweden.

Decision SC63-31: The Standing Committee noted the technical proposal of the STRP on resourcing and implementing Waterbird Population Estimates as presented in SC63 Doc.20 and comments made by Parties; supported the development of the Partnership in line with the approach presented; and requested the STRP to further develop the Partnership proposal and present it to SC64, including recommendations for resourcing it in consultation with the Subgroup on Finance.

Agenda item 18: Report of the Youth Working Group

117. Australia, on behalf of the Chair of the Youth Working Group, introduced the report of the Youth Working Group, contained in document SC63.Doc.18, encouraging Contracting Parties to review the work plan and identify those tasks that they can contribute to. The Chair of the Youth Working Group highlighted efforts of Contracting Parties to appoint youth as focal points; called for financial contributions to support the implementation of the work plan; and noted the newly created Young Professional position for the Pacific and Oceania region to support implementation of the Convention.
118. Contracting Parties welcomed progress made by the Youth Working Group; pointed at the potential of stronger engagement of youth with CEPA focal points; and highlighted the importance of networking with other active youth initiatives.
119. Interventions were made by Belgium, China and Indonesia.

Decision SC63-32: The Standing Committee took note of the progress of the Youth Working Group as presented in SC63 Doc.18 and comments made by Contracting Parties.

Friday 7 June 2024

10:00 – 13:45 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 22: Report of the Secretariat on the challenges and opportunities related to the submission and updating of Ramsar Information Sheets

120. The Secretariat introduced its report on the challenges and opportunities related to the submission and updating of Ramsar Information Sheets (RIS) as contained in document SC63 Doc.22. It outlined the process undertaken to prepare the report and highlighted four thematic areas with proposed actions for the Secretariat to be considered by the Standing Committee, comprising RIS review process; RIS updating cycle; RIS format; and capacity.

121. Contracting Parties thanked the Secretariat for compiling the report. Some Parties suggested establishing a working group to continue work on this topic, including on prioritizing the proposed actions in relation to the RIS format, and for the working group to prepare, in consultation with the Secretariat and the STRP, a draft resolution for consideration by COP15 or COP16. A Contracting Party, on behalf of the Parties of the Africa region, proposed amending wording in Annex 1 of document SC63 Doc.22 to the effect that the Standing Committee or Contracting Parties “should consider” rather than “may consider” actions, to emphasize the urgent need for operational and financial resources to support Parties, and suggested instructing the Secretariat to use surplus funds to commission an independent analysis for preparing a draft resolution on an RIS support mechanism for Contracting Parties, especially developing and least developed country Parties.
122. Contracting Parties made a range of suggestions, including: stronger emphasis on the urgency of updating the RIS; use of maps recognized by the UN; adjustments to the data fields of the RIS; setting firm timelines, prompt communication processes, and clarifying Secretariat responsibilities for review and acceptance of updated RIS, noting the responsibility of Contracting Parties for providing updated information; not reintroducing yearly reports to the Standing Committee, noting that reporting once per triennium is sufficient; adopting a nine-year updating cycle; not engaging RRI in RIS updates; and conducting annual capacity-building activities on RIS.
123. A Contracting Party voiced support for hiring a part-time consultant to assist with the RIS review process, while a Standing Committee member suggested hiring young professionals to give young people the possibility to work with wetlands as well as for financial reasons. A Standing Committee member did not support funding RIS updates, noting that funds should be used for activities benefitting all Parties.
124. The following expressed their interest in participating in the working group: Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Indonesia, Kenya, Morocco, the Republic of Korea, Rwanda, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, Zimbabwe and the Chair of the STRP.
125. Interventions were made by Algeria, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Indonesia, Madagascar, Rwanda, Sweden and the Chair of the STRP.

Decision SC63-33: The Standing Committee decided to establish a working group to further elaborate on the priority actions presented in document SC63 Doc.22, in consultation with the Secretariat and the STRP, to inform the preparation of a draft resolution on strengthening future processes on updating the RIS. The working group will provide a report to SC64.

Agenda item 23: Report of the Secretariat on proposals on strengthening the process to include a Site on the List of Wetlands of International Importance

126. The Secretariat introduced the report, contained in document SC63 Doc.23, providing details on its actions pursuant to Decision SC62-55: sending a notification to National Focal Points inviting them to submit relevant proposals; preparing a first draft for review by the Legal Adviser; and finalizing the report in line with the Legal Adviser’s advice. The Secretariat highlighted a synthesis of challenges identified by Contracting Parties and related proposed actions by Secretariat, with legal opinion where appropriate, under four thematic areas: location of a site being designated; transparency; capacity of Contracting Parties; and capacity

of the Secretariat. The Secretariat added that the relevant note of the Legal Adviser is contained in Annex 1 of the document.

127. Some Contracting Parties stressed that listed proposed actions do not fully reflect the opinions of the Legal Adviser, pointing to relevant parts of the note of the Legal Adviser, including paragraph 13, advising that the Secretariat consult and adopt applicable United Nations standards as necessary, including use of United Nations maps and networks, in placing designated sites on the List ; paragraph 14, advising that the Secretariat has to ensure that its own conduct complies with the Convention and international law in general; and paragraph 15 on including an opportunity in the process, between designation and listing, for other Contracting Parties to react to the designation.
128. They stressed a desire to have a mechanism that allows the identification of disputes between Contracting Parties, pointing to relevant guidance in the note of the Legal Adviser, which stresses that the Standing Committee may make recommendations to COP on how to improve the process through revising the Strategic Framework or by adopting a stand-alone resolution, further noting that the Standing Committee may propose that the COP issue guidance to the Secretariat on procedure for treating an application for listing if an application is made but then contested by another State on account of designation of areas outside the Contracting Party's territory (see paragraph 18 of the note of the Legal Adviser). They underscored the need to extend the process to existing sites. They stressed that designating sites for the List of Wetlands of International Importance has a legal impact and potentially affects other Contracting Parties, noting that tension created by past cases should be avoided in the future.
129. They further pointed to the International Law Commission's Draft articles on the responsibility of international organizations, pointing to Article 17, paragraph 2, noting that "an international organization incurs international responsibility if it circumvents one of its international obligations by authorizing member States or international organizations to commit an act that would be internationally wrongful if committed by the former organization and the act in question is committed because of that authorization"; and Article 32, paragraph 1, which notes that "the responsible international organization may not rely on its rules as justification for failure to comply with its obligations under this Part". They emphasized that while the current process of the Secretariat ensures that the technical components of the listed sites are complied with, it does not entail appropriate focus on legal implications. They recommended that the document be revisited to more accurately reflect the opinions of the Legal Adviser on the location of a site being designated, amending the proposed relevant actions and presenting a revised version of document SC63 Doc.23 for further discussion at SC64. They suggested that a friends of the Chair group be established to further discuss and review process for including a site on the List of Wetlands of International Importance.
130. A Contracting Party underscored that all changes to the boundaries of existing sites should be considered, proposing relevant amendments to the table including proposals on strengthening the process in document SC63 Doc.23, and further suggesting a subscription system of notifications for interested Contracting Parties, rather than all Contracting Parties being notified for every amendment.
131. A Contracting Party noted the need for increased transparency and digitalization of the process. Other Contracting Parties supported the efforts to improve the process and the work by the Secretariat and expressed interest in taking part in further work.

132. The following countries expressed interest in participating in the friends of the Chair group: Algeria, Argentina, China, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Madagascar, Mauritius, Morocco, the Republic of Korea, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Zimbabwe.
133. Interventions were made by Algeria, Argentina, Botswana, Brazil, Colombia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Mauritius, Morocco, Panama, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Zimbabwe.

Decision SC63-34: The Standing Committee took note of the Secretariat’s report on proposals on strengthening the process to include a site on the List of Wetlands of International Importance and comments made by Parties, and decided to revise SC63 Doc.23 for presentation at SC64 to more accurately reflect the views of the Legal Adviser, with a group of interested Parties to review the actions proposed in the document and provide additional recommendations for strengthening the process for including a site in the List of Wetlands of International Importance.

Agenda item 24: Update of the Secretariat on the implementation of Resolution XIV.20

134. The Secretariat introduced its report on the implementation of Resolution XIV.20 as presented in SC63 Doc.24. It provided an update of activities relating to coordination and consultation, including the Secretariat’s participation in an informal group and contribution to reports and assessment of environmental damage to Ukraine’s Ramsar Sites. The Secretariat reported that ten days of fieldwork in Ukraine had now been completed, and that further assessments would be done in from September to December 2024. A further report will be provided to SC64.
135. A Contracting Party, on behalf of 44 countries including 13 Standing Committee members, welcomed the Secretariat’s work on an independent assessment of the impacts of the aggression of the Russian Federation on Ukraine’s Ramsar Sites, highlighting the direct physical damage and pollution of wetlands caused by attacks, such as the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam. The Contracting Party reaffirmed its commitment to implement the Convention, noting that the aggression of the Russian Federation prevents it from protecting, restoring and wisely using its Ramsar Sites, and calling on the Russian Federation to cease its aggression.
136. An intervention was made by Ukraine, which read a joint statement which is included as Annex 1 of the present report.

Decision SC63-35: The Standing Committee took note of the update of the Secretariat on the implementation of Resolution XIV.20 on the Convention’s response to environmental emergency in Ukraine relating to the damage of its Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites) stemming from the Russian Federation’s aggression.

Agenda item 11: Report of the Strategic Plan Working Group (continued)

137. The Co-Chair of the Strategic Plan Working Group introduced document SC63 Doc.11 Rev.1, noting that the document had been revised to include, in Annex 3, the wording on the Strategic Plan Goals agreed to by the Working Group as of June 5 and noting that the Working Group had agreed that the timeline for the Fifth Strategic Plan would be 2025 through 2034. The Co-Chair added that an additional document, reflecting the overall discussions including all bracketed text, had been sent to members of the Working Group and Contracting Parties

and Observers attending SC63. The Co-Chair recalled that meeting reports and consultation outcomes are available on the Fifth Strategic Plan webpage, called for Contracting Parties to engage in the discussions and requested regional groups to consult on the matter, noting that the Working Group is Planning to meet at least three times over the next three months.

138. The Co-Chair invited text proposals on targets by 14 June. Some Contracting Parties requested additional time for providing their input to the new document, citing the need for regional consultation, and noting that their views are not adequately reflected in the current state of work, including on the recognition of a broader perspective for conservation in the Strategic Plan. The Co-Chairs urged members of the Working Group to keep to the 14 June deadline for input, given the time pressure, and noted that there had been many opportunities during the consultation process over the past year to express views.
139. Several Contracting Parties suggested amending the wording in Annex 3 of document SC63 Doc.11 Rev.1, proposing that the Working Group “generally agreed” rather than established consensus around these goals and noting that the current formulation suggests that the language is negotiated text, which would not be an accurate reflection of the status of the document. .
140. Interventions were made by Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Georgia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Sweden, Switzerland and the United States of America.

Decision SC63-36: The Standing Committee took note of the progress report of the Strategic Plan Working Group (SPWG) and comments made by Parties on document SC63 Doc.11 Rev.1, and welcomed the progress made by the SPWG in Annex 3 of that document, with amended language, as a basis for continued discussions to work towards a draft resolution for COP15.

Agenda item 7.2: Report of the Management Working Group: Report on the process for recruiting a new Secretary General (continued)

141. Brazil provided a progress report on contact group discussions, noting that, given the limited time at its disposal, the group was not able to reach consensus either on the text or on the modalities for the new process. Brazil stressed that the revised document Doc.7.2 Rev.1 takes note of the views expressed and requests SC64 to continue discussions based on the annex of the revised document, which contains the different proposals and a revised version of the draft resolution. Brazil added that since no consensus could be reached on modalities, suggestions by Contracting Parties were captured on both options to proceed through a resolution or via a Standing Committee decision.

Decision SC63-37: The Standing Committee took note of the views expressed regarding the process for recruiting a new Secretary General and requested SC64 to continue discussions on this matter on the basis of the annex to document SC63 Doc.7.2 Rev.1.

Agenda item 27: Adoption of the report of the meeting

142. The Chair of the Standing Committee invited Contracting Parties to review the draft daily reports.
143. Participants noted corrections and clarifications regarding paragraphs 7 and 14 of SC63 Rep.3 and paragraphs 28 and 29 of SC63 Rep.5.

144. Interventions were made by Canada, Madagascar, the Republic of Korea, and the Chair of the STRP.
145. The Chair of the Standing Committee noted that the report of the last day of the meeting would be prepared by the Secretariat and circulated among Contracting Parties.

Agenda item 28: Any other business

146. A Contracting Party suggested preparatory, voluntary online work on the Rules of Procedure, proposing a intersessional process leading to a discussion at COP15. Another Party supported the suggestion, stressing the need to consider the Rules in advance of the COP and emphasizing that the intersessional process would be a consultation rather than a negotiation.
147. Other Contracting Parties opposed the suggestion, emphasizing the need not to pre-empt discussions at COP15, and noting that interested Contracting Parties can submit a relevant draft resolution. A Contracting Party proposed deferring consideration of the Rules until after COP15.
148. The Legal Adviser noted that any party may propose amendments to the Rules of Procedure by submitting a proposal to the Secretariat at least four months before the COP.
149. The Chair of the Standing Committee underscored the process for proposals highlighted by the Legal Adviser and noted that interested Contracting Parties may continue discussions informally.
150. A Contracting Party noted consideration of a draft resolution on how Contracting Parties are organized in regions and on the composition of the Executive Team and the Management Working Group. Due to lack of time, the Chair of the Standing Committee invited the interested Contracting Party to share details by electronic correspondence.
151. Interventions were made by Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Sweden, Switzerland and the Legal Adviser.

Agenda item 29: Closing remarks

152. The Secretary General thanked all participants for their engagement; the interpreters and the Secretariat for their hard work; the host country Switzerland for its support; IUCN for hosting; and the Chair of the Standing Committee for the leadership.
153. The Chair of the Standing Committee expressed his gratitude to the interpreters, the Secretary General, the Secretariat and to all participants of SC63, and closed the meeting of the Standing Committee.

Annex 1

Intervention of Ukraine under agenda item 24: Update of the Secretariat on the implementation of Resolution XIV.20

Joint Statement

Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

Dear Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of 44 countries, among which there are 13 Standing Committee Members and Alternative Members, including Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Georgia, Guatemala, Japan, Republic of Korea, Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, as well as other Contracting Parties: Albania, Andorra, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, Uruguay, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and my own country, Ukraine.

This statement is open for further alignments.

Distinguished Delegates,

We welcome the factual update report from the Secretariat, as requested by the COP, on the implementation of Resolution XIV.20, and invite the Standing Committee to take note of the update. This report demonstrates the ongoing work undertaken by the Secretariat to implement an independent assessment of the impacts of the aggression of the Russian Federation on Ukraine's Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites) and we encourage the Secretariat to accelerate its efforts for documenting these impacts on the ground.

We highly appreciate the efforts of the Secretariat in contributing to the preparation of the Rapid Environmental Assessment of Kakhovka Dam Breach report and The Ukraine Environmental Damage Assessments report, as well as further measures assisting in the evaluation of damage to the Ramsar Sites in Ukraine stemming from the Russian Federation's war of aggression. The work of the Secretariat demonstrates the ability of the Convention to respond and react to emergency situations impacting wetlands.

We welcome the ongoing actions taken by Contracting Parties and international organizations to support the independent assessment and subsequent advice on the restoration of Ukraine's wetlands of international importance. We affirm our support to reconstruction in Ukraine, including for providing assistance for the restoration of its wetlands of international importance, as noted in Resolution XIV.20.

We would like to reiterate that Ukraine is home to a number of Ramsar sites, many of which are still facing unprecedented threats due to the Russian Federation's war of aggression. These internationally important wetlands, and their natural process and biodiversity, have suffered from direct physical damage and pollution. In particular, due to the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam, the desiccation of the emptied Kakhovka reservoir has rapidly transformed a mature and fully functioning aquatic ecosystem, existing since the dam's completion around 70 years ago.

Following the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam last year, attacks on Ukrainian hydroelectric power plants (HPPs) have further affected Ukrainian wetlands. Missile attacks on the Dnipro HPP reportedly led to a massive leakage of petroleum products into the Dnipro River. Two Ramsar sites “Archipelago Velyki and Mali Kuchugury” and “Sim Maiakiv Floodplain” were reportedly damaged by the leakage. Additional attacks in March on the Kaniv and the Dnister HPPs are likely to have damaged wetlands, such as the Ramsar site “Liadova-Murafa”, which serve as habitats for internationally important populations of waterbirds. Continuous shelling and explosions have rendered it impossible for certain bird colonies, such as flamingos, to breed and have altered their migratory routes, posing a significant threat to biodiversity.

Reaffirming our commitment to the implementation of the Ramsar Convention, we reiterate our demand for the Russian Federation to cease its aggression, which prevents Ukraine from exercising its obligations under the Ramsar Convention to protect, restore, and wisely use its Ramsar sites, and withdraw its troops from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

We call upon Contracting Parties and international organizations to stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine and call for a renewed commitment to the objectives of the Ramsar Convention in safeguarding our shared environmental heritage.