

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

Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. note the progress of the Secretariat in providing a support mechanism to Contracting Parties for the completion of national wetland inventories; and
- ii. request the Secretariat to further expand the national wetland inventories support mechanism, including through the mobilization of resources and partnerships, to offer further training and technical support.

Progress on the support mechanism for Contracting Parties on completion of national wetland inventories

1. In line with the successive Strategic Plans of the Convention, inventories of all wetlands have remained a priority area of focus for the Contracting Parties. However, Contracting Parties in all regions face various challenges to the implementation of scientifically robust national wetland inventory processes.¹ Further to Standing Committee Decision SC62-34, the Secretariat presented at the Committee's 63rd meeting (SC63) its progress in developing a support mechanism comprised of activities to support Contracting Parties in completing national wetland inventories (NWIs), with five areas of focus²:
 - a. further identification of specific needs and key constraints which Contracting Parties face in developing a wetland inventory;
 - b. development of additional guidance;
 - c. capacity building including training courses and training materials;
 - d. implementation support, including institutional partnerships; and
 - e. resource mobilization.

¹ See information document SC63 Inf.2 *National wetland inventories: Synthesis of the 13 in-depth interviews for further identification of specific needs and key constraints for Contracting Parties*, at <https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc63-inf2-national-wetland-inventories-synthesis-13-depth-interviews-further>.

² See document SC63 Doc.10 *Urgent challenges to the wise use of wetlands to receive enhanced attention: Update on wetland inventories*, at <https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc63-doc10-urgent-challenges-wise-use-wetlands-receive-enhanced-attention-update-wetland>.

2. In Decision SC63-27, the Standing Committee noted the progress of the Secretariat in developing a mechanism to support Contracting Parties in completing NWIs and requested the Secretariat to pursue fundraising activities to amplify its development.
3. The present report provides an update on NWI-related activities that have been conducted in the intersessional period from March 2024 to October 2024.

Further identification of specific needs and key constraints

4. The Secretariat compiled the insights, needs and constraints in relation to NWIs of the ten Contracting Parties that participated in the Module 1 NWI training session in the Republic of Korea in September 2024³ as well as from three additional Parties (China, Costa Rica and Gabon) whose experiences were shared during the course. Discussions during the course aimed to enrich the understanding of the challenges and constraints faced by national authorities. The insights gained will be used to adjust guidance materials and training resources being developed to support development of NWIs, and to support the inclusion of case studies. The Secretariat expresses its gratitude to the national experts who shared their time and experience in this regard.
5. Responses by Contracting Parties to the six questions related to NWI implementation in the National Reporting form⁴ will be used to inform the Secretariat of the status of NWIs across regions and will provide national figures on wetland extent, according to the three following categories: inland wetlands, coastal wetlands, human-made wetlands⁵. The reports will also provide further information about the progress and gaps expressed by the Contracting Parties. The analysis of the answers will be reported to the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP15).

Development of additional guidance

6. Development of guidance addressing three priority topics is underway, supported by expert consultants who were hired in June 2022.⁶ These priorities were presented at SC63, and were set based on a review of existing NWI guidance and on interviews with Contracting Parties in the last quarter of 2023.
 - a. The guidance document on “common elements of NWIs” will identify core data and indicators for NWI which correspond to NWI objectives. The objectives of an NWI should be carefully framed by the national context, while simultaneously helping to track relevant global indicators, such as those related to the Sustainable Development Goals (indicator SDG 6.6.1 related to wetland extent), the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (notably, indicators related to targets 1 to 3 that will be adopted at the 16th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity), the Paris Agreement (assessing carbon storage, removals and avoided emissions) and land degradation neutrality targets in the context of the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

³ See paragraph 11 below for more information on this event.

⁴ See questions 8.1 to 8.6 in the draft reporting form at <https://www.ramsar.org/document/proposed-national-report-convention-wetlands-cop15>.

⁵ These figures will feed into Sustainable Development Goal's Indicator 6.6.1 “Change in the extent of water related ecosystems over time”. The Convention on Wetlands and UNEP have been co-custodian of Indicator 6.6.1 since 2017 (see paragraph 2, [SC63 Doc.10](#)).

⁶ Expert consultants Max Finlayson, Iryna Dronova, Dan Friess and PJ Stephenson support the Secretariat for the training course programme (Module 1 and 2) and for the elaboration of guidance documents.

NWI approaches and methods should address such data needs and ensure data robustness and interoperability.

- b. The guidance document on “NWI structured process” will guide Contracting Parties in planning and developing a sustained institutional and science-based process encompassing definition of NWI objectives, data collection, action-oriented data use and data updating, with clear identification of roles and responsibilities across ministries and national or sub-national agencies and research institutions.
 - c. The third guidance document on “NWI data management protocols” will be developed once common core elements and practices for NWI have been established. This guidance document will focus on how to maintain data quality, consistency and interoperability. It will also encompass guidance on appropriate use of existing technologies and datasets, such as the application of Earth observations in NWI.
7. The Secretariat leads this work in close consultation with the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), and consults International Organization Partners (IOPs), other partners and donors. This consultation helps leverage additional technical expertise and gather case studies. This work is also enriched by the experiences of countries that have successfully developed a NWI process.

Capacity building

8. The training programme on NWIs aims to support Contracting Parties to gain knowledge and know-how on how to undertake an NWI within an appropriate policy, scientific and technical framework. The programme is delivered in each of the three official languages of the Convention, and for each language consists of three in-person training sessions held in successive years, with sustained dialogue with the participants over the three years.
9. A call for applications to join the English, French and Spanish courses was sent to eligible Contracting Parties on 8 April 2024 with a deadline for application of 31 May 2024.⁷ Participants were required to enrol for the three modules of the training course and to ensure continued engagement via assignments to be conducted between the on-site sessions, and participation in quarterly online group discussions.
10. Forty-two applications were received, including 25 applications for the English-speaking course, 11 for the French-speaking course and six for the Spanish-speaking course. As training sessions can only accommodate ten Contracting Parties (i.e. 20 participants) each, English-speaking participants were selected by the Secretariat in consultation with the United Nations Office of Sustainable Development (UNOSD) based on eligibility for travel support, relevance of the rationale, and the NWI status of the country. As the demand for NWI training exceeds the current capacity to provide it, the Secretariat continues to explore options for providing further opportunities for Contracting Parties to participate in an NWI course. Some Parties expressed specific needs for updating their first editions of NWI, and the Secretariat also aims to support that ambition in the future if new funding becomes available.
11. The first English-speaking training course has been organized in the Republic of Korea, with the support of and in partnership with UNOSD. Module 1 of the course took place from 9 to 13 September 2024, hosted by the National Institute of Ecology in Seocheon. There were 19

⁷ The funding secured to date enabled the Secretariat to offer the training only to Official Development Assistance (ODA) eligible countries at this stage.

participants representing ten Contracting Parties, as well as a team of trainers including representatives of the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), the Observatory of Mediterranean Wetlands (Tour du Valat) and representatives of some Contracting Parties. The National Institute of Ecology of the Republic of Korea provided technical expertise and organized guided visits in inland and coastal wetlands for the participants. Modules 2 and 3 of the English language course will be organized in the Republic of Korea in September 2025 and 2026 respectively.

12. Module 1 of the French training course will be conducted from 10 to 14 February 2025 in Arles, France, hosted by Tour du Valat, and module 1 of the Spanish course will take place in Colombia, hosted by the Humboldt Institute. These two institutions have agreed to provide in-kind support through hosting arrangements, participation of experts and the organization of field visits.
13. Associated online training materials in the three official languages will be made available on the website of the Convention, with the support of the training platform of the United Nations Information Portal on Multilateral Environmental Agreements (InforMEA). All Contracting Parties will be able to freely access these materials which will deliver an online certificate for each module completed. The first module will be available by the end of 2024.
14. These activities are supported through voluntary contributions made by the Government of Norway and the Flemish Region in Belgium.

Implementation support

15. The Secretariat continues to engage with the Secretariat of the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) regarding the development of the online “Global Ecosystem Atlas” based on the IUCN Global Ecosystem Typology, including by participating in the Ad-hoc Scientific and Technical Committee of the Global Ecosystem Atlas initiative. A proof-of-concept product will be presented at COP16 of the CBD which will take place in Cali, Colombia, from 21 October to 1 November 2024.
16. The Secretariat will work with the STRP on the further development of implementation support with a focus on the application of Earth observation (EO) in NWI, building on the consultation with the Earth observation community conducted by the STRP pursuant to Decision SC63-30. This will also support the preparation of module 2 of the training course that will be dedicated to EO methods and approaches and the use of existing data products.
17. With funding from the Flemish Region in Belgium, the Secretariat will provide direct technical support to African Contracting Parties on the development of NWI, drawing on the training materials developed or being developed. This will be implemented between 2025 and 2027. Additional funding requirements for this activity are to be determined.

Resource mobilization

18. The Secretariat received additional resources from the Government of Switzerland in the second quarter of 2024, in addition to funds already received from Norway and Belgium. Table 1 below presents a summary of funding secured until 2024, both at the Secretariat and UNOSD, and an updated indication of the funding requirements identified to date from 2025 to 2029. This estimate does not encompass funding needs for more extensive implementation

support. Further funding requirements may be identified over the course of the planned activities, and in relation with ongoing work of the STRP.

Table 1: NWI support mechanism – secured funding until 2024 and estimation of funding requirements for 2025 to 2029

	Aim	Deliverables	Funding secured until 2024 (in CHF)	Funding requirements for 2025-2029 (CHF)
Guidance material	Increase policy and institutional relevance of NWI process	Definition of common elements of NWI, including core data/indicators	40,000	
	Increase NWI data quality, consistency, and interoperability	NWI data management protocols guidance	40,000	
	Strengthen roles and responsibilities in NWI process	NWI structured process guidance	50,000	
Capacity building	Strengthen capacities to develop a complete NWI process	Module 1 in-person training course	60,000 for EN session 120,000 for FR and SP sessions	
	Increase appropriate use of EO techniques	Module 2 in-person training course	60,000 for EN session	120,000 for FR and SP sessions
	Improve updates of NWI	Module 3 in-person training course	60,000 for EN session	120,000 for FR and SP sessions
	Develop knowledge on NWI process development	Online training material	20,000	20,000
Implementation support	Support NWI data collection for Parties	Feasibility study and consultation for an initiative dedicated to Earth observation (EO) support		40,000
	Accompany African Parties to design and complete a NWI process	Technical support to NWI process in selected African countries	135,000	To be determined according to countries' new requests
Total funding and requirements (in CHF)			585,000	300,000