

**14th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties  
to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands**

**“Wetlands Actions for People and Nature”  
Wuhan, China and Geneva, Switzerland, 5-13 November 2022**

**Ramsar COP14 Doc.9.2**

**Report of the Secretary General on the implementation of the Convention:  
Work of the Secretariat**

1. This report covers the work of the Secretariat from the close of the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP13), on 29 October 2018, until 5 August 2022.
2. The report provides both an overview and selected highlights of the work completed by the Secretariat during the triennium and an additional eight months, drawing from the reports presented at the 57th, 58th and 59th meetings of the Standing Committee (SC57, SC58 and SC59)<sup>1</sup>. The documents prepared for COP14 provide further detail on various areas of the Secretariat’s work.
3. The past two years have been marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, with significant impacts on the operations of the Convention. These have included the need to hold the third Extraordinary meeting of the Conference of the Parties (ExCOP3) in 2021, in order to postpone COP14 to 2022 and to adopt the budget for the continued operation of the Convention in 2022. Pandemic-related travel restrictions led to a change in the original plans for COP14, so that it now takes place in a hybrid modality in Geneva, Switzerland, and Wuhan, China.
4. Additionally, travel restrictions during this period resulted in the cancellation of face-to-face meetings of the Standing Committees and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP). Efforts were therefore focused on online meeting of the governing bodies to address priority matters. Nonetheless, considerable action continued to be taken by both Contracting Parties and the Secretariat to implement the decisions taken at COP13 and at SC57, SC58 and SC59/2021, adapting to the context of the new working environment resulting from the pandemic. At the Secretariat, actions were taken to enable staff to work effectively from home when advised by the relevant national authorities, with a full return to the office on 14 February 2022. The Secretariat made efforts throughout the triennium to embrace new technologies to support the work of Contracting Parties as well as to strengthen staff capacities.
5. In January 2022, the Secretariat reviewed progress made in 2021 regarding the actions and indicators identified in the 2019-2021 triennial workplan approved by Decision SC57-21 and the annual workplan for 2021 approved by Decision SC59-12, and to identify specific activities for 2022. This review, which took place during five virtual sessions in January 2022, confirmed successful implementation of planned activities despite the challenges of the pandemic, while

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc57-doc5-report-of-the-secretary-general>;  
<https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc58-doc6-report-of-the-secretary-general>;  
<https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc59-doc6-report-of-the-secretary-general>; and  
<https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc592022-doc6-report-of-the-secretary-general> .

activities that required travel had to be postponed. It also showed considerable progress in the triennium in completing the desired results identified across the functional areas included in the workplan approved by the Standing Committee. The 2022 workplan presented to SC59/2022 in Document SC59/2022 Doc.18 extends work in core areas of the Secretariat identified in the 2019-2021 workplan and includes those that could not be completed due to the pandemic, such as work related to COP14 and its preparatory process. As in previous years, the Secretariat's workplan continues to serve as the basis for the work of the Secretariat and for the development of individual workplans for all staff and evaluation of staff performance.

### **Strengthening service to Contracting Parties' decision-making and accountability**

6. A major area for improvement during the triennium was the delivery of the Secretariat's core role of servicing Contracting Parties, and accountability in all the work of the Secretariat to implement decisions and requests from the Contracting Parties. This area of work was prioritized in the triennial work plan for this period.
7. A critical function of the Secretariat is the organization of meetings of governing and subsidiary bodies of the Convention, including the Standing Committee and the STRP. During the reporting period, the Secretariat made logistical arrangements and prepared meeting documents and daily reports and a final report for SC57, SC58 and SC59, both the session in 2021 and the resumed face-to-face session in May 2022, as well as an online session in June 2022. It also supported processes for Contracting Parties' consideration of draft resolutions at SC59 and COP14. The Secretariat also prepared the third extraordinary COP (ExCOP3) and COP14, as well as five regional preparatory meetings, and contributed to various groups established by the Standing Committee and the Conference of the Parties.
8. The Secretariat supported the STRP in the delivery of its 2019-2021 work plan, working closely with the Chair. During the reporting period, the Secretariat made logistical arrangements and prepared meeting documents for STRP22, STRP23 and STRP24. The Secretariat also supported task leads, facilitated drafting and oversaw the production, editing, translation and dissemination of STRP products. Notable outcomes include:
  - *Global Wetland Outlook: Special Edition 2021*: This flagship report was published on 15 December 2021 as part of the Convention's 50th Anniversary. A suite of communications materials related to the launch were also released (see paragraphs 57 and 58 below for details);
  - Policy Brief 5: *Restoring drained peatlands: A necessary step to achieve global climate goals*;
  - Policy Brief 6: *Transforming agriculture to sustain people and wetlands*;
  - Briefing Note 9: *Guidelines for inventories of tropical peatlands to facilitate their designation as Ramsar Sites*;
  - Briefing Note 10: *Wetland restoration for climate change resilience*;
  - Briefing Note 11: *Practical peatland restoration*;
  - Briefing Note 12: *The contribution of blue carbon ecosystems to climate change mitigation*;
  - Briefing Note 13: *Wetlands and agriculture: impacts of farming practices and pathways to sustainability*; and
  - Ramsar Technical Report 11: *Global guidelines for peatland rewetting and restoration*.
9. The Secretariat team worked in a coordinated manner with clear roles and responsibilities to support these meetings. Participants expressed satisfaction with the organization and running of the meetings.

10. The Secretariat has been actively liaising with China as the host country for COP14. The organization of COP14 has been a particular challenge because for the first time a meeting of the Conference of the Parties is being held at two venues, in Switzerland and China, with virtual connections for parts of the meeting and internet streaming from the venue in Switzerland. Arrangements are also being made of course for SC60 and SC61, to be held immediately before and after COP14. China, as the Host Country, is generously funding all aspects of the arrangements. The Government of Switzerland however has generously provided the venue for the meeting in Geneva. The Secretariat's role includes the preparation, translation and posting of documents, registration, fundraising and arrangements for sponsored delegates, coordination of side events, all of the logistics and the other activities that go towards ensuring the success of a meeting of the Conference of the Parties
11. In light of the pandemic, the Secretariat organized ExCOP3, the first such meeting held virtually, from 25 October to 4 November 2021, for the purpose of considering and approving the postponement of COP14 and the budget for the operation of the Convention in 2022. In preparation for this meeting, the Secretariat organized five regional pre-COP meetings held online in September 2021:
  - Africa Region (22 September)
  - Asia Region (27 September)
  - Americas Region (17 September)
  - Oceania Region (22 September)
  - Europe Region (23 September)
12. ExCOP3 was attended by 303 participants from 126 Contracting Parties, with 48% female and 52% male participation. The meeting adopted two Resolutions: one on the 2022 budget; and one the postponement of COP14 to 2022.
13. After COP13, the Secretariat carried out an internal assessment of the organization of the meeting and identified key lessons. These were taken into account in developing best practices, which were incorporated into a new manual that provides guidance on planning and preparing for future meetings of the COP.
14. The Secretariat has also been active in supporting implementation of decisions made at COP13 and by the Standing Committee. An important activity has been to support working groups established by COP13 and SC57, including through specific tasks given by SC57. The Secretariat organized teleconferences, prepared meeting agendas and minutes, secured and managed consultancies that support the working groups, and assisted in the preparation of reports and documents presented to SC58 and SC59 and its resumed session. Support has been provided to the following groups:
  - i. Effectiveness Working Group – The Secretariat managed the tender and contracting for the consultant, administered a survey to all Contracting Parties on behalf of the Working Group and provided administrative support to the consultant as requested by the Working Group.
  - ii. Working Group on the review of the Strategic Plan – The Secretariat supported the Working Group in fulfilling the requests listed in Annex 1 of Resolution XIII.5 on *Review of the fourth Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention*, including through a consultancy, notably to review the fourth Strategic Plan (SP4), identify potential refinements to SP4 and any elements that can contribute to the preparation of a new Strategic Plan after 2024.

The Working Group prepared a draft resolution for consideration at the resumed session of SC59/2022.

- iii. Observer Status Working Group – The Secretariat has facilitated several calls of the Working Group and provided summary reports. Additionally, the Secretariat supported the Working Group on the follow-up to the independent legal analysis consultancy requested in Decision SC57-14 and in developing the terms of reference (TORs) for the consultancy on financial analysis of the legal status of the Secretariat requested in Post-SC58 Intersessional Decision 09 of 16 March 2021.
  - iv. Working Group on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) – With guidance from Contracting Parties the Secretariat prepared an updated draft RRI report template and supported its review by the Working Group and for consideration at the resumed session of SC59/2022. The Legal Advisor prepared an analysis of the legal status of RRIs as requested in Decision SC57-29. With guidance from Contracting Parties, the Secretariat supported the Group’s work to prepare a draft resolution for consideration at the resumed session of SC59/2022.
  - v. Management Working Group – The Secretariat supported the work of the Management Working Group, including by organizing meetings in November 2019, June and November 2020, June 2021 and January and May 2022. The Management Working Group provided guidance on the work of the STRP, including the implementation of the STRP work plan, the appointment of the new STRP Chair, the cancellation of STRP23 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the decision to advance the highest priority STRP tasks virtually thereafter.
15. The Secretariat has sought guidance from the Executive Team on the preparation of meetings of the governing and subsidiary bodies of the Convention and on various administrative matters. The reports of the Executive Team and Chair of the Standing Committee to SC58, SC59 and SC59/2022 were published as documents SC58 Doc.5, SC59 Doc.5 and SC59/2022 Doc.5<sup>2</sup>
16. A major highlight was the work carried out to implement Resolution XIII.1 on *World Wetlands Day*. The Secretariat assisted a group of interested Contracting Parties under the leadership of Costa Rica in the process of preparing a draft resolution for submission to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The process was delayed in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Once UNGA resumed its work, the Secretariat supported the group, including through the preparation of the draft resolution, a concept note shared with all Contracting Parties and importantly an online high-level event held on 7 July 2021, hosted by Costa Rica, Mexico, Slovenia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in partnership with the Secretariat. The Secretariat also engaged in the consultations held by Permanent Missions in New York and communicated to all Contracting Parties once the draft resolution was scheduled to be presented, to ensure support through the Permanent Missions. On 30 August 2021, the UNGA, in Resolution 75/317, proclaimed 2 February as World Wetlands Day. The Resolution, co-sponsored by 75 Member States, acknowledges the essential role of wetlands in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals but also that they are among the ecosystems with the highest rates of decline, loss and degradation. Importantly, the Resolution calls on Member States, UN agencies and other actors to observe the day, and the UNGA invites the Secretariat to provide a report at its next session in 2022, providing an opportunity for a submission of a substantive draft resolution on wetlands. World Wetlands Day 2022 was the first time the occasion was

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<sup>2</sup> See [www.ramsar.org/document/sc58-doc5-report-of-the-executive-team-and-chair-of-the-standing-committee](http://www.ramsar.org/document/sc58-doc5-report-of-the-executive-team-and-chair-of-the-standing-committee); [www.ramsar.org/document/sc59-doc5-report-of-the-executive-team-and-chair-of-the-standing-committee](http://www.ramsar.org/document/sc59-doc5-report-of-the-executive-team-and-chair-of-the-standing-committee); <https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc592022-doc5-report-of-the-executive-team-and-chair-of-the-standing-committee>.

observed as a UN international day, providing a unique opportunity to raise commitments and actions for wetlands' conservation and wise use.

17. The Secretariat continues to standardize practices and systems in its support to the meetings and processes of the governing and subsidiary bodies of the Convention. All related data and information are managed through a constituent relationship management (CRM) system that continues to be enhanced to efficiently manage mailings, correspondence, registration for meetings including the SC59 virtual meetings, ExCOP3, meetings of the Subgroups and Working Groups, and capacity-building webinars. This provides the Secretariat with better information on participation for all meetings, including participation by gender, and enables meetings and communications to be organized more efficiently. The Secretariat has also deployed Microsoft Teams for strengthened, more efficient communication and collaboration across the Secretariat, and enhanced engagement with partners and other organizations, including UN agencies and other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).
18. The Secretariat continues to support Resolution XIII.6 on *Language strategy for the Convention* and invites Parties to provide translated Convention on Wetlands documents of wider relevance for publication on the Convention's website.

#### **Increasing relevance of wetlands and the Convention to global sustainable development policy objectives**

19. The Secretariat has strengthened its work in supporting international cooperation and enhancing the relevance of wetlands and the Convention in the global policy agenda. Capacities for this have been reinforced with the recruitment of a Director of Science and Policy and with the engagement of the Secretariat's professional team in relevant policy processes. Given that the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change are driving national and international planning and funding efforts, increased attention has been paid to ensure that wetlands and the work of Contracting Parties under the Convention contribute to these policy frameworks.
20. The Secretariat has actively engaged in discussions regarding achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including with regard to SDG Indicator 6.6.1 (on "Change in the extent of water-related ecosystems over time"). It participated in the 8th, 10th and 12th meetings of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators and continued its engagement in the work of the target team on Indicator 6.6.1 led by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). The Convention, as co-custodian with UNEP of SDG Indicator 6.6.1, prepared a joint storyline with UNEP for the UN Secretary General's Report to the High-Level Political Forum in July 2022. The Secretariat also continues to engage with UN Water on the work programme for SDG 6 ("Ensure access to water and sanitation for all").
21. In line with Resolution XIII.7 on *Enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions* and Decision SC57-47 on wetland inventories, the Secretariat has continued to support Contracting Parties in developing wetlands inventories and completing and refining information on wetland extent for reporting on SDG Indicator 6.6.1 through National Reports. An update of the activities undertaken is provided in document SC59/2022 Doc.9.
22. At the invitation of Austria as President of the European Union, the Secretary General contributed to the deliberations of the EU's Water Directors' meeting in 2019, stressing the links between wetlands and water management.

23. At World Water Week 2019, the Secretary General participated as a panellist in the high-level panel hosted by the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management / UNDP-SIWI Water Governance Facility, and the Convention's delegation participated in events on "Freshwater Biodiversity: Linking Biodiversity with Inclusive Development to Achieve the 2030 Agenda" and "Locking Carbon in a Water Vault: Wetlands as Ecosystem-based Mitigation". The Secretariat also contributed to World Water Week in August 2021, through the session on "Pathways for protection: Blended solutions to protect and manage rivers". The Secretariat is a co-organizer of an event focusing on "Source to Sea management" to be held during World Water Week 2022.
24. The Secretariat also participated in MOP9 of the UN Water Convention in Geneva in September and October 2021, to explore possible synergies and future cooperation, notably in transboundary river basins that are also covered by RRIs (covering the Amazon, Senegal and Niger river basins, Central and Eastern Africa, and Central and West Asia).
25. The Secretariat contributed to the UN World Water Development Report (WWDR) 2022 on *Groundwater: Making the invisible visible*, launched on World Water Day, 22 March 2022. The Secretariat also participated remotely in the 9th World Water Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in March 2022, with the Secretary General joining a dialogue hosted by France on wetlands and the Convention.
26. The Secretariat also provided input to other meetings and events focusing on water, including a special session on "Mainstreaming Lakes and Wetlands in the Global Water Agenda and SDGs" organized in the context of the 18th World Lake Conference held in Guanajuato, Mexico, in November 2021, and a dialogue on nature-based solutions and water organized by IUCN and the Geneva Environment Network in November 2021.
27. The Secretariat has been active in supporting the achievement of SDG 14 ("Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development"). The Secretary General is one of the two focal points for the Community of Ocean Action on Mangroves, and the Secretariat thus participated in the preparatory meeting of the Communities of Ocean Action for the second UN Ocean Conference and in the meeting of the SDG 14 Communities of Ocean Action on marine and coastal ecosystems, coral reefs and mangroves in 2019, in Incheon, Republic of Korea, in May and in Montreal, Canada, in November. At the second UN Ocean Conference to support the implementation of SDG 14 in June 2022 in Lisbon, Portugal, the Secretary General participated in the interactive dialogue on managing, protecting and restoring coastal and marine ecosystems and in the Ministerial Roundtable of the High Level Symposium on Water on synergies between SDG 6 and SDG 14.
28. In November 2021 the Secretariat and other partners of the Action Platform for Source-to-Sea Management (S2S Platform), including the Global Water Partnership, UNESCO Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP), Stockholm International Water Institute and UNDP co-organized an event in the framework of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. Titled "Starting at the Source to Save the Ocean", the event explored ways to enhance collaboration between freshwater and marine communities in monitoring and reducing pollution across inland, coastal and marine ecosystems. The Secretary General also provided a video speech with other heads of organizations, including UN agency leaders, to raise awareness of source-to-sea management approaches through social media.
29. The Secretariat was also active in supporting SDG 15 ("Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss") and the biodiversity

agenda. It has significantly strengthened its engagement with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). In November 2018, the Secretariat participated actively in CBD COP14, in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, raising the visibility of the Convention on Wetlands in the High-Level Segment of the African Ministerial Summit on Biodiversity and in roundtables on infrastructure and on energy and mining. The Secretary General participated as a panellist in the session of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and Vision to 2050, and delivered a statement on behalf of the eight biodiversity-related Conventions.

30. The Secretariat has consistently participated in the thematic consultations for the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. Main highlights include:
- i. The Secretariat and six Standing Committee representatives participated in the consultation workshop of biodiversity-related Conventions in Bern, Switzerland, in June 2019 and in the second MEAs consultation workshop in 2020 and 2021. At the first meeting, the Secretary General delivered a statement on behalf of the eight biodiversity-related Conventions. The Secretariat also participated in the thematic consultations for the post-2020 framework on marine and coastal biodiversity, capacity building and unlocking financial resources for nature-based solutions.
  - ii. The Secretariat participated in a post-2020 expert group on communications in November 2019 to develop a communications strategy for the lead-up to CBD COP15 and in support of the implementation of the Post-2020 Framework.
  - iii. The Secretary General participated in the 25th Senior Officials Meeting of the UN Environment Management Group (EMG) at the margins of the SDG Summit in September 2019 in New York, and in the 27th Senior Officials Meeting in October 2021 which focused on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, the UN Common Approach to Biodiversity and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. The Secretary General highlighted the importance of wetlands and the critical contributions of the Convention to the framework.
  - iv. The Secretary General delivered a video statement at the High-Level Segment of CBD COP15 (Part 1) in October 2021, and a joint statement of the Biodiversity Liaison Group (BLG) at the Panel “Promoting synergistic action for biodiversity, climate, land and oceans”.
  - v. The Secretary General participated in the Executive Briefing on CBD COP15 organized by the Geneva Environment Network in November 2021 to highlight the outcomes of Part 1 and the next steps for Part 2.
  - vi. The Secretariat provided inputs to and participated in the four meetings of the Open-ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and the Third meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI) in March 2022.
31. The Secretariat has continued to participate actively in the BLG, in particular through the Secretary General’s attendance at its 13th and 14th Ordinary Meetings (in September 2018 and September 2019 respectively), in which a major focus was how to increase the visibility and relevance of biodiversity. The Secretary General also participated in the virtual meeting of the BLG in October 2021 with a major focus on engagement in the process for the development of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, CBD COP15 and the Glasgow Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP26).

32. Also related to biodiversity, the Secretariat participated in the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) in February 2020, in Gandhinagar, India. At the high-level segment on migratory species conservation in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, the Secretary General emphasized the critical role of wetlands for migratory species and the relevance of the Convention in implementing the Post-2020 Framework, as well as the ongoing collaboration between the two Conventions. She also participated in a special meeting convened by the Ministry of the Environment of India regarding progress and best practice in implementing the Convention on Wetlands at the national level. Before COP13, in November 2019, in Bonn, Germany, the Secretariat also participated in an event organized by CMS on connectivity and the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.
33. The Secretariat continued its engagement with the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) during the reporting period. The Secretariat renewed the Memorandum of Cooperation with IPBES in November 2019, extending it for the duration of the IPBES 2030 rolling work programme, and attended the 7th, 8th and 9th Plenary Sessions of IPBES, making joint statements at IPBES-7 and IPBES-9 with the other members of the BLG, and an individual statement at IPBES-8.
34. Given the critical role played by wetlands in climate change mitigation and adaptation, the Secretariat has engaged in the climate change policy agenda. In particular, the Secretariat participated in COP24, COP25 and COP26 of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- i. At COP24 in Katowice, Poland, in December 2018, the Secretariat participated as a speaker in events on “Protecting Tropical Peatlands Together – a Triple win for the Climate, People and the Planet” with other partners in the Global Peatlands Initiative and on “Innovative climate-smart management and South-South cooperation at a global scale”. The panel shared experiences regarding progress in collaborative efforts across sectors to tackle the challenge of peatland protection and restoration.
  - ii. At COP25 in Madrid, Spain, in December 2019, Secretariat staff participated in a workstream on adaptation, attended meetings and participated as panellists in two side events. The COP was also an opportunity to engage with relevant stakeholders in identifying opportunities to better integrate wetlands in climate change measures.
  - iii. The Secretariat engaged extensively at COP26 in Glasgow, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in October and November 2021. Highlights included:
    - Prior to the COP, the Secretariat prepared a brief on harnessing wetland wise use, protection and restoration in delivering climate change outcomes. The brief synthesizes information on relevant provisions of Resolutions adopted by the COP of the Convention on Wetlands, as well as relevant guidance documents and knowledge products prepared by the STRP. The brief is available in the three languages of the Convention.
    - During the COP the Secretary General was a speaker in a side event on “CBD COP15: Strengthening Synergies through the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and Promoting Transformational Change to Restore Balance with Nature”.

- The Secretariat co-organized three events, exploring different aspects of wetlands action for climate change outcomes in collaboration with governments, multilateral development banks, International Organization Partners (IOPs) and the Rio Conventions : “Financing Wetlands Conservation and Restoration for Climate Benefits – Challenges and Opportunities”; “Partners for Wetlands: Decade for Wetland Restoration”; and “Leveraging MEA synergies in peatland protection and restoration for climate outcomes”.
  - Secretariat staff participated as speakers or panelists in nine other events including: “Policy Dialogue to Strengthen Blue Carbon’s Contribution to Carbon Neutrality”; “NbS and Climate Change: Harnessing the power of ecosystems for adaptation and mitigation”; “Peatlands and wider wetland conservation, restoration and management”; “International Blue Carbon Partnership - Working together to deliver outcomes for climate, the environment and people”.
- iv. The Secretariat also participated in the 56th session of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) of UNFCCC in June 2022 in Bonn.
35. The Secretariat participated in COP14 of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in September 2019 in New Delhi, India. Among other inputs, the Secretariat made a statement in the high-level segment on the interlinkages between wetlands and land degradation, climate change and biodiversity loss.
36. The Secretariat engaged actively in the fourth and fifth sessions of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-4, Nairobi, Kenya, March 2019; UNEA-5, online, February 2021 and February-March 2022) emphasizing the role of wetlands in building a resilient and inclusive post-pandemic world and achieving the SDGs and participating in the Leaders Dialogue with the MEAs and in the multi-stakeholder dialogue on “Strengthening actions for nature to achieve the SDGs building back greener”. The Secretary General also delivered a statement at UNEP@50 in March 2022 and participated in the multi-stakeholder dialogue on “Strengthening UNEP for the implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development”.
37. As a Global Partner of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the Secretariat has continued to actively engage in this agenda and the task forces of the aquatic and transitional ecosystems monitoring and evaluation framework and best practices. These engagements informed the consideration of SDG 6 Indicator 6.6.1 for which the Convention is co-custodian and various targets of the Convention’s fourth Strategic Plan as priority indicators of the UN Decade’s monitoring framework. To mark the opening of the UN Decade in June 2021, the Secretariat produced three fact sheets<sup>3</sup> highlighting the untapped potential of wetlands to assist restoration efforts by Contracting Parties, policy makers and practitioners.
38. The Secretary General and Secretariat staff participated in the IUCN World Conservation Congress in September 2021, including in dialogues relating to biodiversity and the formation of the emerging Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. Highlights included the participation of the Secretary General as speaker: in the opening plenary on “Our Freshwater Global Risk: Taking Actions to Reverse the Trend”; in the closing plenary on “A blue breakthrough”; in the sessions on “Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework: a Recipe for Success” and on “Deep Time 2029: What must we do now in 2021, to successfully address the Nature Emergency by

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.ramsar.org/news/wetlands-restoration-as-part-of-the-un-decade-of-ecosystem-restoration-unlocking-the-untapped>.

2050?"; in the event on "IUCN Global Species Action Plan: supporting implementation of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework through species conservation"; and in a high-level roundtable organized by the Ministère de l'Écologie of France exploring how France and the EU can further scale wetlands actions. She presented the French delegation with a certificate to mark the designation of France's latest Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar Site), Baie d'Audierne.

39. Secretariat staff also made contributions as speakers or panellists to numerous other events including: "The Global Biodiversity Framework and freshwater ecosystems: Moving to implementation"; "Protecting aquascapes: integrating freshwater, estuarine and marine conservation"; "Partners for Wetlands' Decade for Wetland Restoration"; and "Development of a global wetland training facility".
40. The Secretariat remains committed to advancing SDG 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" and mainstreaming gender considerations across the activities and meetings of the Convention.
  - i. In February 2021, the Secretariat published guidelines with supporting case studies to assist Contracting Parties to mainstream gender in their work in wetland conservation and wise use in support of implementation of Resolution XIII.18 on *Gender and wetlands*<sup>4</sup>. Contracting Parties are reminded that the guidelines are available in three languages on the Convention website.<sup>5</sup>
  - ii. The Secretariat has adjusted its systems to better promote and report on gender balance in the delegations to meetings of governing and subsidiary bodies of the Convention. The Secretariat continues to collect data and statistics related to gender representation as part of efforts to monitor progress towards gender parity. Furthermore, the Secretariat whenever relevant reminds Contracting Parties to consider nominating female representatives as part of their delegations. In this regard, at SC59 in 2021, 52% of the participants were women and 48% men. This same trend is observed in other meetings of the Convention such as ExCOP3 in 2021 and the regional meetings in preparation for COP14.
41. The Secretary General was one of the International Gender Champions, a network of ambassadors and heads of agencies established initially in Geneva and now active in other cities. The Secretary General implemented her commitment to this initiative throughout the reporting period, and participated in the network's activities including its annual meeting to review progress during 2021 and priorities for 2022.
42. The Secretariat continues to strengthen its relationship with the Geneva-based Permanent Missions to the United Nations and UN agencies. The Secretariat planned a briefing for the Permanent Missions on the linkages between wetlands and the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and on important issues on COP14. However the briefing scheduled for 2021 was cancelled due to the COVID-19 situation. The Secretariat is planning a briefing in 2022 prior to COP14.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ramsar.org/document/guidance-on-mainstreaming-gender-under-the-ramsar-convention-on-wetlands-0>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ramsar.org/resources/training-webinar-mainstreaming-gender-under-the-convention-on-wetlands>.

43. The Secretariat continued to contribute to the InforMEA initiative and participated in the 12th meeting of the InforMEA Steering Committee that took place virtually in November 2021. The Secretariat contributed on issues including API (Application Programming Interface) implementation, semantic indexing and e-learning. An introductory course on the Convention on Wetlands is under development and will be available when completed to download on the Convention's website.
44. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting postponement of meetings of relevant policy processes, there was considerable activity in advancing work, creating important opportunities for engagement by the Secretariat to position wetlands and the work of the Convention in the global agendas on biodiversity, sustainable development and climate change. In fulfilment of its mandate, the Secretariat continued its engagement with relevant and prioritized MEAs and UN processes. However, as reported previously, it remains a major challenge that the Secretariat does not have access to the UNGA or the UN Economic and Social Council, the UN platform for debate on sustainable development. The proposal to obtain observer status was submitted by Uruguay, then Chair of the Standing Committee, in 2017, but its consideration has been deferred. The Secretariat has continued to face limitations to its engagement in the UN, including UNGA and UN-Water processes. This issue is being addressed by the Standing Committee's Working Group on Observer Status.

#### **Strengthening support and enabling implementation**

45. Over the extended triennium the Secretariat has provided support in the designation of 125 new Ramsar Sites and the update of information for 221 existing Ramsar Sites, including support in data transfer into the Ramsar Sites Information System (RSIS), publication and translations. The Secretariat supported Contracting Parties with four Ramsar Advisory Missions (RAMs), to Italy (Venice and its Lagoon), Montenegro (Skadar Lake), the Russian Federation (Kurgalsky Peninsula) and Spain (Doñana) before the pandemic. Due to the travel restrictions imposed, none of the RAMs being prepared for Bolivia (Poopó y Uru-Uru), Malawi (Lake Chilwa), Nicaragua (Sistema de Humedales de Bahía de Bluefields) or Tunisia (Sebkhet Sejoumi) could be undertaken. The Secretariat is now starting to conduct the RAMs as restrictions to travel have been lifted.
46. The Secretariat continues its efforts to strengthen its "enabling" role (in addition to direct support to individual Contracting Parties), to use its limited capacity and resources in a more efficient and strategic way. During the reporting period the Secretariat engaged in numerous capacity-building efforts including training sessions on the use of the RSIS and webinars in all three Convention languages as follows:
  - i. March 2020: "How to Access Green Climate Fund (GCF) for the Conservation of Wetlands";
  - ii. September 2020: "Guidance on utilizing Earth observation as a tool for wetland management, provided for Eastern and Southern African parties";
  - iii. September 2020 and October 2020: "Grant Writing: How to write effective project proposals" (English, French and Spanish);
  - iv. October 2020: "National Wetlands Inventories Training Webinar" (English with French and Spanish interpretation);
  - v. November 2020: "Preparation of National Reports to COP14" (English, French and Spanish);
  - vi. December 2020: "Wetlands as Nature-based Solutions (NbS) for Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)" (English with French and Spanish interpretation);
  - vii. March 2021: "Training Webinar – Preparation of Draft Resolutions for COP14" (English, French and Spanish);

- viii. March 2021: “Training Webinar: Mainstreaming Gender under the Convention on Wetlands” (English with French and Spanish interpretation);
- ix. October 2021: “Connecting for Wetlands Action: An Intergenerational Dialogue” (English with French and Spanish interpretation);
- x. December 2021: “Financing Mechanisms for Freshwater Ecosystems” (English with French and Spanish interpretation);
- xi. January 2022: “Acting for Wetlands: Challenges and Opportunities Ecosystems” (English with French and Spanish interpretation);
- xii. February 2022: “Training Webinar on Nagao Wetland Fund 2022”;
- xiii. May 2022: “Wetlands and Climate Change: Actions to protect blue carbon ecosystems and peatlands for mitigation and adaptation” (English with French and Spanish interpretation); and
- xiv. July 2022: “Wetlands and Agriculture” (English with French and Spanish interpretation).

In total, these webinars saw 1,524 participants join from 147 countries, with 53% female and 47% male participation.

- 47. In the context of furthering its enabling role, the Secretariat continued to support Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) which remained active, including by: participating in their governing structures; advising on and supporting the implementation of their activities; supporting fundraising efforts in line with the COP13-approved priorities; facilitating and compiling their reports to the Standing Committee; and providing support to the Standing Committee’s Working Group on the RRIs. Advice was also provided to all RRIs in the submission of annual reports to SC58 and SC59.
- 48. During the reporting period, the Secretariat supported the work of RRIs and participated in meetings of their governing structures, notably of the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet), the Nordic Baltic Wetlands Initiative (NorBalWet), the Ramsar Centres for Eastern Africa (RAMCEA), East Asia (RRC-EA), Central and West Asia (RRC-CWA) and for Training and Research in the Western Hemisphere (CREHO), and the Initiatives for the Conservation and Wise Use of the Plata River Basin, the Amazon River Basin, the Caribbean Regional Initiative, the Niger River Basin (NigerWet), West African Coastal Zone Wetlands (WACoWet), High Andean Wetlands, and Mangroves and Coral Reefs.
- 49. The Secretariat also engaged in strategic partnerships. The Secretariat and Danone renewed and signed a three-year Partnership Agreement (2022 to 2024) in December 2021 to increase global visibility and understanding of wetlands among public and private sector decision-makers. The Partnership Agreement with a total value of EUR 240,000 lays out three main areas of cooperation: to raise awareness on the importance of wetlands through the global World Wetlands Day campaign; to accelerate adoption of best conservation practices by financing wetlands conservation through the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards and the Action for Wetlands Fund; and to facilitate dissemination of scientific knowledge to inform decision-making and promote sustainable management practices of wetlands, including by drawing on the work of the STRP.
- 50. The Secretariat continues to strengthen its collaboration with the IOPs. Periodic teleconferences between the partners are held to review implementation of the Joint Activities for Collaboration in the renewed Memorandum of Cooperation. The IOPs contributed to the development of the 50th Anniversary campaign and actively supported World Wetlands Day campaigns in 2019, 2021 and 2022.

51. Regarding resource mobilization, during the triennium the non-core resources amounted to CHF 888,000 to support the priorities established by the COP in Annex 3 of Resolution XIII.2 on *Financial and budgetary matters*. Specifically, the funds mobilized contributed to developing the guidance document on gender and wetlands, RAMs, facilitating the development of wetland inventories and the work of the STRP. In the financial report on non-core projects, and Annex 3 of the Subgroup on Finance Report and Decisions of SC59 in June 2021, the signing of the IKI Caribbean project was noted with satisfaction. At the time of writing of this report fundraising for sponsored delegate travel to COP14 was ongoing, with contributions so far received from the governments of Australia, Canada and Norway.
52. The Secretariat also provided support to Contracting Parties in their fundraising efforts and has encouraged Contracting Parties to use the database of funding organizations to communicate news on funding opportunities. In addition, a guide for writing conservation project proposals has been made available on the website to support Parties in writing project proposals in response to the request made at SC57. In addition, the training course “Grant Writing: How to write effective project proposals” was held in September and October 2020.
53. The Secretariat facilitated meetings in February 2019 between the National Designated Authority of Burkina Faso for the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the IUCN office for West and Central Africa (IUCN/PACO) to develop a national wetland project to be submitted to GCF. In the same month the Secretariat also facilitated a planning workshop during the Second Governing Council Meeting of the Ramsar Centre for Eastern Africa to plan a 2019 activity to develop a sub-regional programme to be submitted to GCF. In the Americas, the Secretariat is supporting countries of the High Andean Wetlands and the Mangroves and Coral Reefs Regional Initiatives in the submission of regional projects to donors (GEF and IKI). The Secretariat also supported the fundraising activities of the Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative (IBRRI) to identify new sources for funding.

#### **Enhancing the visibility of wetlands and the Convention**

54. The visibility of wetlands and the Convention are being increased through a variety of communications outreach efforts. The Secretariat has strengthened information sharing among the stakeholders of the Convention and increased public awareness about wetland services and benefits through the Convention website, social media, newsletter, a broad range of e-lists and outreach campaigns such as World Wetlands Day. The Secretariat has taken an approach of speaking with “one voice” to its target audiences about wetlands issues and linking wetlands to relevant policy frameworks such as SDGs and climate change. The number of website visitors in the current reporting period was 1.2 million, more or less consistent with the previous triennium.
55. Communications outreach activities have increased in support of the Secretariat’s active participation in events over the triennium. Key messages from the Convention that were delivered via social media and other communication channels have included the role of wetlands in reversing biodiversity loss, climate change adaptation and mitigation, water quality and quantity, and disaster risk reduction. Social media impressions topped 76 million for the reporting period, a 74% increase from the last triennium. Four opinion editorials by the Secretary General were published: two on Project Syndicate and two via the Reuters news platform.
56. In 2020, the Secretariat with the assistance of Media Measurement conducted an analysis of the global “conversation” about wetlands in social and mainstream media. The analysis was

conducted to develop insights for more effective positioning of wetlands by the Secretariat and Contracting Parties, and to inform the 50th Anniversary theme. These insights coupled with the advice of a communications expert were shared with the CEPA Oversight Panel, the STRP and the COP14 host country (Chair of the Subgroup on COP14) to assist Parties in selecting the theme for the 50th Anniversary campaign in 2021 that engaged and activated partners and stakeholders to conserve, protect and restore wetlands.

57. The 50th Anniversary campaign was launched in March 2021, following World Wetlands Day. A suite of campaign materials was made available to Parties on a dedicated campaign website. Assets and resources included the 50th Anniversary logo, 50th Anniversary video, brand guidelines, social media toolkit and tiles, fact sheets and gifs. All campaign resources were available in English, French and Spanish. The campaign highlighted key international days throughout 2021, including World Water Day (22 March), the International Day for Biological Diversity (22 May), World Ocean Day (8 June), International Youth Day (12 August), and the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction (13 October). Overall engagement and participation of stakeholders in the campaign was strong. The social media analytics show 4,869 instances of the campaign hashtag being used on Twitter and Instagram posts with a reach of 32 million viewers across all regions. There were 40,000 page visits to the 50th Anniversary website.
58. From August to October 2021 youth were invited to engage in the 50th Anniversary campaign. The campaign website featured content from youth including an open letter and stories. In October the Secretariat hosted an online event, titled: “Connecting for wetlands action: An intergenerational dialogue” which was opened by the Secretary General, hosted a panel of speakers across different generations and was moderated by representatives of youth organizations. The event focused on current youth action for wetlands and reflections on lessons learnt in the 50 years since the signing of the Convention. A video of the online event is available on the Convention’s YouTube page.
59. The Secretariat worked closely with the STRP Chair to develop outreach activities for each STRP product and provided guidance on making these products more policy-relevant and appropriate for communications purposes. A major area of work has been the preparation of the *Global Wetland Outlook 2021: Special Edition*, launched as part of the 50th Anniversary. In preparation for the launch, the Global Wetlands Outlook microsite<sup>6</sup> was updated in line with the new document. A suite of communications materials related to the launch was also released; these included a news story and press release, suggested social media posts, key messages and social media tiles. An op-ed by the Secretary General was published by the Thompson Reuters Foundation.
60. World Wetlands Day continues to be a powerful outreach platform from which to raise global and national awareness about wetlands. Over the triennium the Secretariat noted a steady increase in the number of events organized by Contracting Parties and other environment organizations. A transition to virtual events ensured that the COVID-19 pandemic had the least possible impact on World Wetlands Day. The number of events registered on the map of events totalled:
  - 1,495 events in 108 countries in 2019
  - 1,595 events in 85 countries in 2020
  - 1,139 events in 82 countries in 2021
  - 1,591 events in 86 countries in 2022

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.global-wetland-outlook.ramsar.org>.

61. The 2022 World Wetlands Day campaign highlighted the importance of actions to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands for human and planetary health. “Wetlands Action for People and Nature” was the theme for the first celebration of World Wetlands Day as a United Nations International Day (see paragraph 16 above). The Secretariat provided communication and campaign resources to support national outreach activities. It also invited the heads of relevant UN agencies and the IOPs to observe World Wetlands Day, as requested by the UNGA Resolution, by providing video statements and support for the global social media campaign. Video statements were received from the heads of UNEP, CBD, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) and UNFCCC; and written statements were provided by the heads of UNDP, CMS, and the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement, all highlighting the importance of wetlands. The UN Secretary General tweeted on World Wetlands Day. Importantly a page was created on the webpage of the UN on World Wetlands Day.<sup>7</sup> As part of the World Wetlands Day global launch, the Secretariat organized a virtual panel in January 2022, titled “Acting for wetlands – challenges and solutions”. The interactive panel discussion explored priority actions for wetlands nationally and internationally, including new partnerships and investments. The panel discussion was moderated by the Secretary General and included speakers from the government of Costa Rica, a representative of UNDP’s Biodiversity Finance Initiative, the current vice chair of the STRP and the Head of Birdlife International. A recording of the virtual event is available to view on the Convention website<sup>8</sup>.
62. The Secretariat would like to acknowledge Danone and the Norwegian Environment Agency that provided funding during this triennium to produce the information and outreach materials for World Wetlands Day. Furthermore, the Secretariat recognizes the in-kind contribution of key partners Canon, CBD, WWF, UN Water, IUCN, the Nature Conservancy and Medwet to World Wetlands Day outreach campaigns.
63. Digital platforms and in particular social media are proving to be powerful media to amplify our messages and reach larger and diverse audiences. This can be confirmed by the 436 million social media posts to mark World Wetlands Day 2022, driven by collective campaigns by the Secretariat, governments, international and other partner organizations.
64. During the reporting period the Convention increased its proactive engagement with international media outlets to raise awareness of wetlands and the Convention around key moments, such as UNFCCC COP26 and the launch of *Global Wetlands Outlook 2021: Special Edition*.
65. The Wetland City Accreditation initiative has continued to contribute to enhancing the visibility of wetlands and the Convention, including through the Convention’s webpage that features the cities accredited at COP13.
66. The Secretariat continues to participate in meetings of the “Flotilla”, a mechanism to coordinate communications and achieve communications synergies among a number of biodiversity and environmental agreements and organizations. A key benefit of the Flotilla is the ability for organizations to share their communications plans and resources allowing other organizations to support their efforts. The Flotilla has played an important role in broadly disseminating the Convention’s 50th Anniversary campaign resources, STRP products and supporting campaigns and broader messages promoting this milestone year for wetlands, climate and nature.

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.un.org/en/observances/world-wetlands-day>.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.ramsar.org/event/acting-for-wetlands-challenges-and-opportunities>.

## **Strengthening the Secretariat's efficiency and effectiveness**

67. As in the previous triennium, the guiding objective continued to be to “organize to deliver” on the Strategic Plan of the Convention and the mandate of the Contracting Parties, and to use in the most efficient way the limited resources of the Convention and the capacities of the Secretariat. However, the reporting period was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Secretariat had to adapt its way of delivering its work in this context.
68. From the first signs of the pandemic, actions were taken to enable staff to quickly and effectively work from home. Previous efforts during the triennium to strengthen IT infrastructure and train staff in the utilization of online tools allowed the Secretariat to work in a coordinated and effective manner despite working remotely. The Secretariat embraced new technologies to support the work of Contracting Parties including for their decision-making processes. Some highlights are provided below.
69. The management of finances and administration continued to be strengthened during the reporting period and adapted to new ways of working:
  - i. The financial health of the Secretariat was considered as having improved both by the auditors and by the Standing Committee. The financial stability of the Secretariat remained solid in 2021 as in the prior years. In 2021 there was an increase in cash from CHF 5,634K in 2020 to CHF 6,946K, while there was a decrease in Contracting Parties net receivables from CHF 680K in 2020 to CHF 484K, representing a decrease in total outstanding contributions of 8% compared to 2020. The Subgroup on Finance recognized this as an exceptional outcome among comparable organizations, and acknowledged the Secretariat's actions to this end. The regular payment of the Parties is also evidence of their increased trust in the Secretariat.
  - ii. During the last two years, the financial audit was done remotely and the Secretariat successfully delivered all requested documentation and information. All the issues that were open prior to the current Secretary General taking office in 2016 were closed in the financial audit of the 2019 accounts in April 2020, and no new financial issues have been raised. This is the result of the improvements put in place since the last triennium.
  - iii. Procedures were developed and rolled out: the allocation of financial roles and responsibilities between IUCN Finance and the Secretariat were clearly defined; internal controls between IUCN and the Secretariat were regularly validated; financial operational guidelines were developed as part of the Secretariat Standard Operational Procedures; and staff were regularly trained and supported.
70. Technologies and business practices continued to be developed to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the work of the Secretariat. Of particular importance was the development of the new CRM database that has enabled more efficient management of mailings, meeting registration, and contacts while ensuring compliance with new privacy laws. This and other technologies have resulted in reducing the time spent by staff on administrative tasks (e.g. correspondence, registration, meeting organization), use of digital rather than paper documents, online signatures and electronic submission of documents and contracts, voice-over-internet services for conference calls, online learning (webinars) and higher utilization of digital document sharing mechanisms.

71. Work continued from the previous triennium in ensuring that the capacity of staff meets the requirements of the key functions of the Secretariat, as identified in the triennial and annual work plans approved by the Standing Committee. Talent management policies and procedures of IUCN were implemented, including on appraisals and promotions. Work was also conducted with IUCN to enhance alignment of competencies, functional requirements and equity within the Secretariat, with IUCN and the market. A main highlight in this area was the conversion of the Internship Programme into a Junior Professional Programme whereby job descriptions and hiring conditions were revised and enhanced in line with IUCN. With the recent recruitment of a new 50% Human Resources Officer, work is ongoing to allocate roles and responsibilities between the Secretariat and IUCN HR and to put in place the necessary coordination mechanisms in the context of the Letter of Agreement, to ensure the effective delivery of the full HR functions, following the experience for financial management. During the reporting period other competitive recruitment processes were completed, including to fill the positions of: Director of Science and Policy; Senior Advisors for Africa, Asia and Oceania; Scientific and Technical Officer; Capacity Development and Policy Officer; and Content Communications Officer. Efforts are being made to ensure that regional and gender diversity is achieved to the extent possible. Currently, 50% of Secretariat staff are women.
72. Professionally facilitated planning workshops for the Secretariat were conducted at the beginning of each year in the reporting period, to review and assess progress and identify activities and indicators for the following year, in the context of the 2019-2021 triennial workplan and annual workplans, as well as the 2022 annual workplan approved by the Standing Committee. The new streamlined format organized around the key functions has proven useful in enabling the Secretariat to focus on assigned activities, deliverables and outcomes that have been identified by the Contracting Parties as being most critical to the effective implementation of the Convention, thus contributing to staff ownership, coherence and accountability to the instructions provided by Parties. During the pandemic the annual workshops took place virtually. The last workshop, held in January 2022, confirmed successful implementation of planned activities despite the challenges of the pandemic, while activities that required travel had to be postponed. It also showed considerable progress in the triennium in completing the desired results identified across the functional areas. The 2022 workplan extending work in core areas of the Secretariat identified in the 2019-2021 workplan and including those that could not be completed due to the pandemic, such as work related to COP14 and its preparatory process, was approved by SC59/2022. As in previous years, the Secretariat's workplan continues to serve as the basis for the delivery of the work of the Secretariat and for the development of individual workplans for all staff and evaluation of staff performance.
73. Capacity building of staff continued during the reporting period. The gender equality and mainstreaming training for Secretariat staff called for in Resolution XIII.18 was completed in December 2019. A two-day training session tailored to the needs of Secretariat staff was delivered by the IUCN's gender office. In 2020, following the survey of staff development needs conducted in the previous triennium, training focused on the Myers & Briggs methodology. Individual sessions with a professional coach were conducted to identify personality, communication and work styles, followed by a two-day all-staff workshop focusing on individual strengths and team collaboration.
74. Responding to the identification of wellbeing as a priority for staff in the context of the pandemic during the annual planning process, the Secretariat conducted a survey and as a first response, staff were offered webinars developed by IUCN. The Secretariat went further by organizing an all-staff training workshop on improving resilience and wellbeing in January 2022. Attention was also paid to the challenges and opportunities resulting from working from home.

Regular staff meetings were held while working in these conditions to maintain internal communication and foster a sense of team and connectedness.

75. The reporting period was exceptional in that it was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the resulting challenges, the team has worked hard with achievements in all areas of the Secretariat's work plan as described in this report. The pandemic has also created opportunities to develop new ways of working including virtual means to increase the Secretariat's reach and to build capacities of Contracting Parties. As restrictions in office use, travel and face-to-face meetings started to ease, the Secretariat returned to more normal levels of operation, as shown in the organization of the resumed session of SC59 held in Gland in May 2022. Moving forward, the Secretariat has proved its capacity to adapt and step in as a team to deliver on its mandate, including for the resumed session of SC59 and the ongoing organization of the coming COP14. Overall, the team has continued to strengthen a whole-of-Secretariat approach and to develop additional standard operating procedures (SOPs) in key areas of its work, that have contributed and will continue to contribute to making further progress in terms of operational coherence and efficiency. It has also strengthened its adaptability and innovation capacity.
  
76. Some important challenges identified previously remain, including the legal status of the Secretariat as it relates to access to strategic global fora, signing of donor contracts and talent acquisition and retention. Other areas for further work include: completing work to allocate HR roles and responsibilities and mechanisms for coordination between the Secretariat and IUCN; keeping a deliberate focus on staff wellbeing; continuing to develop more coherent and coordinated approaches across Secretariat teams to achieve enhanced efficiencies and better serve Contracting Parties across all regions; balancing enhanced accountability for implementation of the decisions taken by the COP and Standing Committee with the service provided to Contracting Parties in each region; balancing thematic and regional approaches; and continuing to build the needed capabilities, capacities and skills in core functional areas of the Secretariat's work.