

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

53rd Meeting of the Standing Committee

Gland, Switzerland, 29 May – 2 June 2017

SC53-14

Update on the MAVA project “Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands”

Actions requested:

Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. take note of the progress of the MAVA project “Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands” and its contribution to Resolutions VIII.19 and IX.21, the Convention’s CEPA Programme and the implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024; and
- ii. provide views to the Secretariat regarding progress to date and further implementation of the project.

Background

1. Work on culture in the Ramsar Convention is framed by Resolutions VIII.19 *Guiding principles for taking into account the cultural values of wetlands for the effective management of sites* (2002) and Resolution IX.21 *Taking into account the cultural values of wetlands* (2005). As requested by the Parties in the second of these Resolutions, a Culture Working Group was formed to guide relevant activities, based on Standing Committee decisions SC46-12 in 2013 and SC47-25 in 2014 (<http://www.ramsar.org/activity/ramsar-culture-network>).
2. In accordance with Resolution VIII.19, this field of activity has advanced in close cooperation and efficient complementarity with other relevant multilateral and regional bodies, particularly UNESCO, including its International Hydrological Programme and its World Heritage Centre.
3. In 2015, the Secretariat signed an agreement with the MAVA Foundation for three years for the implementation of the project “Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands”. This allowed the Secretariat to hire a temporary part-time officer to undertake the activities of the project until March 2018.
4. The present document reports on progress on the implementation of the project since SC52 and provides lessons learned and suggests options for possible follow-up derived from this.

Achievements and highlights

5. Progress of work, as part of the *CEPA Action Plan for the Secretariat 2016-2018 triennium* (contributing notably to the goals 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8, see document SC52-23) was reported to the

Standing Committee in document SC52-Inf.Doc.06. The document focused on the scope of the subject, the objective of the Ramsar Culture Network, and its contributions to the implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024. The document also described the relationship of the culture work with *The Ramsar Convention's Programme on communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness (CEPA) 2016-2024* (Resolution XII.9, 2015) and with Resolution VII.8 *Guidelines for Establishing and strengthening local communities' and indigenous people's participation in the management of wetlands* (1999).

Progress with work on culture and livelihoods

6. The agreement between the Ramsar Secretariat and the MAVA Foundation (presented in SC52-Inf.Doc.06) lists a programme of 18 activities over three years from March 2015 to March 2018. Work is progressing and the Secretariat will review how to take this project forward with input from the Standing Committee. Recent highlights in the implementation of the project include:
 - a. "Rapid Cultural Inventories for wetlands" underway in several regions of the world, including a collaborative project with the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage, involving inventories in six countries of the Middle East and North Africa;
 - b. A project funded by UNEP and undertaken in collaboration with the World Heritage Centre, documenting lessons learned from "success stories" in situations where wetland areas are designated under both the Ramsar Convention and the World Heritage Convention;
 - c. Contribution to a new Ramsar Handbook on culture and wetlands, in the 5th edition of the series of Wise Use Handbooks;
 - d. Inputs to a variety of relevant international meetings, including the World Conservation Congress and conferences of the Society for Ecological Restoration and INTECOL;
 - e. Analysis (underway) of culture-related information in Ramsar's national and site-level information and reporting systems;
 - f. Review of progress in implementing Resolutions VIII.19 and IX.21, and analysis of possible policy/guidance gaps in these Resolutions;
 - g. Securing over USD 300,000 co-funding through a GEF project on sustainable wetland management in Gabon, thus bringing the co-funding pledges to some 79% of the three-year match-funding requirement under the MAVA project agreement;
 - h. Commitment by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation to host a Ramsar Culture Network (RCN) workshop in early 2018;
 - i. Increasing the RCN's membership to more than 200 members;
 - j. Appointing leaders and generating activity within four thematic groups in the RCN (Biocultural Diversity; Tourism; Agriculture and Food; and Arts); and
 - k. Publishing illustrated "RCN Update" newsletters with a wide variety of guest articles from practitioners in all regions of the world, focusing on specific topics (available on the Ramsar website at <http://www.ramsar.org/activities/rcn-resources>).

Options to further implement cultural issues

Work on culture and livelihoods contributing to the implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals

7. The Convention's culture work relates to paragraphs 13, 16, 19 and 20 of Resolution XII.2 introducing *The Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024*. Work on culture contributes to most of the 14 listed "priority areas of focus for the Convention in the next nine years" and particularly to those addressing wetland ecosystem services (including cultural services), participation of indigenous people and local communities (pursuant to Resolution VII.8) and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), for example the World Heritage Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity.
8. Cultural aspects are relevant to the following targets of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024: Targets 1 and 11 on wetland benefits, Target 5 on Ramsar Sites, Target 8 on inventories, Target 10 on traditional knowledge and practices, and Target 18 on cooperation.
9. Work on culture also contributes to four of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to specific targets within them: in particular, Goal 4 on education (Target 4.7), Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth (Target 8.9 on tourism), Goal 11 on sustainable cities (Target 11.4) and Goal 12 on sustainable consumption and production (Target 12.b).

Indicators for monitoring cultural ecosystem services as part of wetland ecological character

10. Resolution IX.1 in 2005 clarified that ecosystem services are part of the "ecological character" of wetlands. Ecological character is central to the interpretation of Ramsar obligations regarding wise use of all wetlands and the conservation of listed Ramsar Sites. The concept of ecosystem services has been interpreted by the COP in accordance with the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, and it includes cultural services, such as recreation, education, spiritual values and aesthetic inspiration.
11. Such services could be documented and monitored as part of the Convention's work regarding ecological character of a wetland.
12. One key mechanism could be the global database of Ramsar Sites, the Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS), which is populated with information supplied by Parties in the Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS; the current version is annexed to Resolution XI.8) submitted for each Site and updated at least every six years (Resolution VI.13). Resolution VIII.19 encourages Parties to compile and assess relevant cultural elements when preparing or updating their Ramsar Information Sheets.
13. The RIS includes a section for adding information about social and cultural values associated with the Site, and relevant guidance is given in Resolution IX.21 and in a guidance document published by the Culture Working Group in 2008 (<http://www.ramsar.org/document/culture-and-wetlands-a-ramsar-guidance-document>). Another section of the RIS asks specifically about ecosystem services provided by the Site, including cultural services (for which a basic typology is provided).
14. Triennial National Reports submitted by Parties to each COP could also be another useful source. The standard report format includes general questions about the implementation of the

culture-related Resolutions, and specific questions on particular aspects such as whether assessments have been made of ecosystem services and of traditional knowledge and practices.

15. Currently, an analysis of data on these issues from the RSIS and the National Reports is being developed as part of the MAVA-funded project. It is hoped that this could provide a more complete overview of wetland-related cultural values and practices, and allow for the identification of trends and changes over time.
16. Some of the culture questions in the National Report format relate to Target 10 in the Strategic Plan, which concerns the documentation and integration of traditional knowledge and practices in the implementation of the Convention. Since no separate indicator has been defined for this target (nor is there one in effective operation yet for Target 18 in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, to which Ramsar's Target 10 is the wetland equivalent), the relevant National Report information is likely to form the best means of monitoring progress towards its achievement. Part of what Parties will be able to report on the relevant questions (mainly the current question 10.4) could be drawn from the Rapid Cultural Inventories that have been carried out as part of the implementation of the MAVA project. So far, these inventories have been conducted on a voluntary basis by a number of Contracting Parties (see paragraph 6.a above). This information could provide part of the picture concerning Ramsar's contribution to the achievement of related parts of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development mentioned above.
17. Two other assessment processes are relevant to the consideration of culture under the Convention. One is the development by the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel of a global report on the "State of the World's Wetlands and their Services to people" (SoWWS). Lessons learnt from implementing the MAVA project could be fed into relevant parts of this, and to the STRP's related high priority methodological tasks (policy brief and toolkit) on wetland ecosystem services assessment and valuation.
18. The second is the process for voluntary self-assessment of the management effectiveness of Ramsar Sites and other wetlands, using the "tracking tool" (R-METT) appended to Resolution XII.15. This tool includes several sections in its datasheets which provide for the situation in a given case regarding cultural issues to be assessed, thereby also providing one means of operating Indicator E in the Ramsar "Indicators of Convention implementation effectiveness" adopted by COP9 in Annex D to Resolution IX.1.

Review of the implementation of Resolutions VIII.19 and IX.21, and results of a gap analysis

19. As part of the implementation of the MAVA project an analysis was carried out in August 2016 of the current status of implementation of the two culture Resolutions, together with a detailed commentary on the interpretation of their individual clauses. This work developed under the project is provided for the information of Contracting Parties and for their consideration should they wish to develop further guidance on this matter.
20. The two Resolutions together contain a total of 20 operative paragraphs and 27 guiding principles in an Annex. Key implementation results since 2002 that are apparent include:
 - a. Reporting on cultural activities to Standing Committee and COP, as provided in Resolution IX.21;
 - b. Establishment and operation of the Culture Working Group as provided in Resolution IX.21;

- c. Production of the Ramsar guidance document on culture in 2008, as provided in Resolution VIII.19 (produced in the three Convention languages);
 - d. Incorporation of traditional knowledge within the scope of the work of the STRP, and prominent reference to it in the Fourth Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024;
 - e. Some reporting of information via RISs and National Reports on other matters covered in the Resolutions, though not in a way that allows good assessment of completeness or adequacy of the measures undertaken at national level. (In many cases this would require specific research efforts.) Work in progress now on Rapid Cultural Inventories for wetlands could help to improve the position on this in the future;
 - f. Increased promotion of information and awareness about cultural aspects of wetlands at global level;
 - g. Some progress in response to the encouragement of synergies with other multilateral agreements; and
 - h. An as-yet poor response to calls for case studies;
21. The project identified some possible gaps, or areas that could be further strengthened if Contracting Parties were to develop further guidance on culture-related issues. These are provided for information to Contracting Parties, and to ensure that the Standing Committee is informed of ongoing work and that the Secretariat can apply its feedback as the project continues its implementation:
- a. Describing or defining what is meant by “culture” in the Ramsar context;
 - b. Clarifying the role of living/contemporary culture, as opposed to traditions and heritage;
 - c. Considering replacement of the terms “material” and “non-material” culture by “tangible” and “intangible” (culture/cultural heritage), which are now widely used by other international instruments;
 - d. Mentioning the place of culture in ecosystem services (in addition to the preambular reference in Resolution IX.21 to “providing vital services”);
 - e. Acknowledging the specific roles of women and young people in the wise use of water resources;
 - f. Providing references to the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024;
 - g. Providing references to links with relevant Aichi targets and SDGs (e.g. Aichi Targets 1, 2, 14, 18, 19; and Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 5, and Targets 4.7, 8.9, 11.4 and 12.b);
 - h. Providing reference to the Ramsar Culture Guidance document from 2008;

- i. Acknowledging the major contributions made over the years by dedicated individuals working on a voluntary basis to increase the attention to culture in the Convention, notably through the Ramsar Culture Network;
 - j. Acknowledgement of support from the MAVA Foundation;
 - k. Identifying the twin issues of (i) recognizing wetland values in cultural and heritage policies and (ii) recognizing cultural and heritage values in wetland policies;
 - l. Providing references to relevant institutional collaboration, particularly from the list in Resolution VIII.19;
 - m. Providing references to cooperation and synergies with other MEAs, notably with regard to sites with multiple international designations;
 - n. Making reference to the position of traditional knowledge in relation to the scientific and technical work of the Convention;
 - o. Making reference to applying lessons learned from case studies or from other research and experiences;
 - p. Referring to both Environmental Impact Assessment and to Strategic Environmental Assessment at the same time;
 - q. Referring to the fact that questions addressing cultural values feature prominently in the Ramsar Site Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (Resolution XII.15);
 - r. Including provisions for monitoring, assessing and reporting on uptake and implementation of the Resolutions and relevant guidance; and
 - s. Referring to capacity needs in relation to culture in the Convention.
22. Since the project will end in March 2018 and in the context of the planned consideration on its further implementation, the Secretariat would like to receive inputs from the Standing Committee on ways forward.