

Draft resolution on Ramsar Advisory Missions

Submitted by Burkina Faso

Action requested:

- The Standing Committee is invited to review the attached draft resolution for consideration at the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Draft Resolution XIII.xx

Ramsar Advisory Missions

1. RECALLING Recommendation 4.7 which established that, when the Secretariat becomes aware that a Ramsar Site is facing change in ecological character, where appropriate it shall propose a Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM) to assist Contracting Parties to address such changes;
2. NOTING that, to December 2016, across all Ramsar Regions, there have been 82 applications of this procedure, with positive results; and COMMENDING those Parties who have so far invited the use of the RAM in order to seek constructive solutions to challenges they face and as a contribution to their efforts towards effective implementation of the Convention;
3. RECOGNIZING the need to underpin and promote the greater application of the RAM as one of the Convention's most important and useful tools for assisting Parties to implement the Convention;
4. ALSO RECOGNIZING that the RAM can be used to provide assistance and advice with development and implementation of wetland policy and planning in general, as well as implementation of site-related commitments;
5. ACKNOWLEDGING that RAMs undertaken jointly with other international processes can be highly cost-effective, and can strengthen synergies at both national and international scales;
6. FURTHER ACKNOWLEDGING the important contribution that STRP, the International Organization Partners (IOPs) and other stakeholders have made to implementation of the RAM process over its 30-year history;
7. WELCOMING STRP's work in the past triennium to comprehensively review and analyse the body of reports from 82 RAM missions (to December 2016), and FURTHER WELCOMING STRP's derived *Briefing Note* and *Policy Brief on Ramsar Advisory Missions* published in 2018;

8. AWARE that the full potential of the RAM mechanism is not being fully realised since (beyond what is contained in the brief Annex to Recommendation 4.7 and in the Ramsar Manual) no background information or guidance is available to Parties and other stakeholders;
9. NOTING that there has been no allocation from the core budget to support implementation of the RAM since COP7 in 1999;
10. RECOGNIZING the value of RAMs also in terms of raising the Convention's visibility, highlighting the commitment of Contracting Parties, and contributing to public awareness concerning wetland conservation and wise use.

THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES

11. REAFFIRMS that the Ramsar Advisory Mission mechanism is one of the key tools available to Parties to assist with implementation of the Convention, constituting a means for providing independent advice relevant to addressing actual and potential change in ecological character at Ramsar Sites;
12. ENCOURAGES more frequent application of the RAM procedure in appropriate cases, as a potentially rapid, small-scale and low-cost form of advice, and as a supplementary way of providing support to Parties facing relevant challenges;
13. URGES that, in undertaking the planning of missions, good use of is made of qualified expert input from STRP (including STRP National Focal Points, as appropriate), and IOPs;
14. ENCOURAGES the operation of RAMs on a joint basis with appropriate mechanisms of other international processes;
15. URGES diligent follow-up by Parties to implementing the recommendations made in RAM reports and to evaluating and reporting on the outcomes, and by the Secretariat, STRP and IOPs, as appropriate, in providing follow-up advice and support if required, and reporting regularly to the COP on implementation of the recommendations;
16. REAFFIRMS that RAM reports are public documents once the Party concerned has had an opportunity to study them;
17. ADOPTS Annex 1 to the present Resolution, which supersedes the Annex to Recommendation 4.7;
18. INSTRUCES the Secretariat, in consultation with the STRP, to prepare operational guidance for the RAM, covering *inter alia* the issues listed in Annexes 1 and 2, to be submitted for adoption by the Standing Committee at its [xx]th meeting;
19. DECIDES to make an allocation for the RAM mechanism from the core budget; and CALLS ON Parties and others in a position to do so to consider making additional voluntary contributions in support of the RAM;
20. THANKS STRP for their significant work during the 2015-2018 triennium to review past RAM experiences; and

21. INSTRUCTS the Secretariat to develop information and communication products that briefly explain what the RAM is, and describe and illustrate (with examples) how it can assist Parties with implementing the Convention.

Annex 1

Guidance in relation to the planning, execution and follow-up of Ramsar Advisory Missions (adapted from Recommendation 4.7)

1. If it comes to the attention of the Secretariat that the ecological character of a listed wetland is changing or is likely to change as a result of industrial development, pollution or other human interference, where appropriate, the Secretariat shall propose to the Contracting Party or Parties concerned to apply a Ramsar Advisory Mission, requesting, at the same time, additional information on the status of the wetland concerned.
2. Where, as a result of this procedure and other information available to the Secretariat, the Secretariat is of the opinion that there is evidence of significant change or likely change in the ecological character of a listed wetland, the Secretariat shall collaborate with the Contracting Party or Parties concerned to arrive at an acceptable solution and the Secretariat may offer advice and assistance to that Party or those Parties, if required. The Secretariat shall inform the Standing Committee of any action it has taken in this connection.
3. If it does not appear that an acceptable solution can be readily achieved, the Secretariat shall immediately bring the matter to the attention of the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee, acting through the Chairman and Secretary, provided by the Secretariat, may pursue the matter, in direct contact with the Contracting Party or Parties concerned and, where appropriate, with other responsible agencies or bodies, with a view to helping to find a solution.
4. In the event of alterations to the List of Ramsar Sites or changes in ecological character in wetlands included therein, the Standing Committee shall arrange for the information to be circulated for discussion at the next Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties in accordance with Article 8 paragraph 2 (d) of the Convention.
5. The Secretariat shall periodically review and report progress on the conservation status of sites to which its attention has been drawn under this procedure. To facilitate follow-up, the Secretariat shall maintain a register of activities undertaken in this connection.

Terms of Reference

6. A concise Terms of Reference (TOR) document should be agreed by the Contracting Party and the Secretariat ahead of each RAM mission and included as an Annex to the RAM report. Whilst there should be flexibility in format and length to take account of the unique circumstances of each RAM, it is suggested that the TOR should always include:
 - A brief statement of the background to the RAM;
 - A listing of the specific issues that the RAM is requested to address;
 - The composition of the RAM mission team;
 - The expected process and timeframe, including planned follow-up to the mission.

Composition of Mission teams

7. Where this is appropriate to the circumstances of individual missions and acceptable to the Contracting Party concerned, use of expertise of the International Organisation Partners could help to ensure the most effective use of the limited financial resources and Secretariat capacity available for application of the RAM.
8. Consideration should be given to the opportunities for enhancing the contribution of the STRP to application of the RAM, including national STRP focal points, as relevant.
9. When planning RAMs, consideration should be given to the opportunities for, and benefits of, inclusion of a representative of another Contracting Party, as a RAM team member or observer.

Joint Missions

10. The reports of missions conducted jointly with other Multi-lateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) should always make clear which Findings and Recommendations relate to obligations under each MEA and which relate specifically to obligations under one MEA or the other.

Mission reports

11. RAM reports should always contain an Executive Summary.
12. It is suggested that all Executive Summaries should, as a minimum, contain:
 - A brief overview of the main technical issue(s) being addressed, with tagging of keywords to facilitate online searching and a link to the relevant RIS(s) and any previous RAM report covering the same site(s);
 - The date and duration of the mission, and the date that the final report was signed off;
 - A statement of the composition of the mission team, ensuring that the broad affiliation of each team member is readily apparent (e.g. Contracting Party, Secretariat, STRP, IOP, independent technical expert) and leaving the detailed names and contact details of positions and institutions for the full report;
 - A link to the Terms of Reference of the mission;
 - The principal conclusions arising from the RAM;
 - The recommendations of the RAM;
 - A statement about how the conclusions and recommendations of the mission are to be followed up.
13. The final Executive Summary (i.e. once the text has been signed off by the Contracting Party and the Secretariat) should be translated into the other official languages of the Convention and posted on the news pages of the Ramsar website as a publically accessible document.
14. It is important that flexibility is retained and that there is no attempt to impose a 'one size fits all' structure for RAM reports. However, it is recommended that the following elements should

always be included and readily identifiable from the headings and sub-headings used in the report:

- Executive Summary.
- Background to the mission (brief summary of consultations that resulted in initiation of the RAM).
- A brief description of the site, including a location map (country scale) and a site map (showing the Ramsar Site boundaries) and links to the Ramsar Information Sheet, but avoiding lengthy technical description where this has no direct relevance to the specific issues being addressed by the RAM.
- A summary of the current situation, as assessed by the RAM team, focusing on findings and conclusions that apply to the core issues for the mission.
- A stand-alone listing of all recommendations.
- A section on follow-up to the mission's recommendations.
- Terms of Reference for the mission (probably as an Annex).
- Composition of the RAM team (Annex – if not already included in the ToR).
- Programme of the field mission (Annex).
- List of stakeholders consulted and other contributors (Annex).

15. It is recommended that future RAMs mission reports should consider the following points:

- Ensuring that recommendations are clearly linked to findings and conclusions and that these, in turn, are clearly linked to the Terms of Reference for the mission;
- Ensuring that recommendations are clearly identified as such in the RAM report;
- Ensuring that recommendations are numbered to make follow-up cross-referencing as simple as possible;
- Grouping related recommendations under corresponding sub-headings;
- Distinguishing between short-term, medium-term and long-term actions;
- Testing whether each recommendation:
 - Identifies clearly what action should be taken?
 - By whom? (being as specific as possible, and considering actions required by government, public-sector bodies, private sector, civil society)
 - By when?
 - Subject to which enabling conditions?
 - With which measurable indicators of (a) implementation and (b) success?

- Supporting text recommendations with a simple table of suggested actions, time-frames (perhaps related to Ramsar trienniums), key stakeholder groups and practical indicators of successful implementation; How (and by whom) will progress with follow-up to RAM recommendations be monitored? How, by whom and to whom should progress be reported? And what measures will be taken if progress is assessed as insufficient by specified dates?

Annex 2

Development of practical and technical operational guidance for Parties, Secretariat and other stakeholders in the form of a simple 'how to' step-by-step manual covering inter alia the following topics

- Circumstances that trigger the proposed use of a RAM
- Links with Article 3.2
- Links with the Montreux Record
- Pre-RAM investigations and advice
- Prerogative of the Contracting Party to invite RAM/approve Terms of Reference (ToR)
- Developing ToRs – standard good practice
- Scope of the RAM
- Coordination and team composition of mission team
- Timeframe considerations
- Role of the Secretariat
- Role of the STRP
- Role of IOPs and other stakeholders
- Resourcing the RAM
- Application to candidate Ramsar sites and other undesignated wetlands
- Application in transboundary contexts
- Operation on a joint basis with mechanisms of other MEAs
- Structure and contents of RAM reports
- The process for following up a RAM report
- Reporting on the activities of the RAM, including a review of outcomes an appropriate time after completion of the mission (typically about six years)