

Report of the Ramsar Regional Initiatives Working Group on Addressing Resolution XIII.9

Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. take note of this progress report on the work of the Ramsar Regional Initiatives Working Group; and
- ii. review and approve the attached draft resolution for COP14 consideration on Regional Initiatives and the new “Operational Guidelines for Ramsar Regional Initiatives to support the implementation of the Convention” provided in Annex 1, to replace the Guidelines adopted through Decision SC52-16;

Background

1. Resolution XIII.9 re-established the (open-ended) Ramsar Regional Initiatives Working Group under Rule 25 of the Rules of Procedure to draft new operational guidelines for Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs), and requested that the Standing Committee, at its 56th meeting (SC56), facilitate the functioning of the Working Group and allocate surplus funds from the core budget for this purpose. At that meeting, the Standing Committee agreed to defer further consideration of the Working Group, and the allocation of funds until SC57 (Decision SC56-07).
2. In Decision SC57-28, the Standing Committee recognized the Working Group on Ramsar Regional Initiatives comprising the coordinators of each of the Initiatives and the regional representatives on the Standing Committee. It asked the Group to develop its terms of reference and work programme options for addressing Resolution XIII.9, and present these at SC58.

Report on progress and future tasks

3. During SC57, the present members of the Ramsar Regional Initiatives Working Group met and discussed the preparation of the operational guidelines and other issues, including identification of specific characteristics of each RRI, allocation of funds, resource mobilization, administration and implementation of individual projects carried by each RRI, and successful experiences of the RRIs.
4. The Working Group provided a further update on its progress to SC57 in document SC57 Doc.25, notably describing:

- i. The Group's meeting regarding the implementation of Resolution XIII.9 on *Ramsar Regional Initiatives*, along with nine other Contracting Parties;
- ii. The composition of the Ramsar Regional Initiatives Working Group, to be made up of the coordinators of each of the RRI and the regional representatives on the Standing Committee;
- iii. The aim of achieving proactive and non-restrictive operational guidelines for Regional Initiatives, whose supreme objective is the protection of wetlands at a regional scale, which considers, promotes and facilitates the strategic partnership between Initiatives, the Convention Secretariat, International Organization Partners and other actors, both in the search for financial resources and in their administration.

Development of the Working Group's terms of reference

5. On July 29 2020, the Group met virtually to finalize its TORs as requested by Decision SC57-28. During the meeting, the Group's members made many editorial suggestions to improve the content of the document. The Group discussed the preparation of Standing Committee papers, including the legal adviser's advice (legal analysis of existing Resolutions). The TORs were subsequently endorsed and translated into the Convention's three official languages.
6. The Group worked through email exchanges, and on September 3 2020, finalized its work plan, which is included in the present document in Annex 2.

Preparation of draft new operational guidelines for Ramsar Regional Initiatives and a draft resolution for consideration by the Standing Committee

7. Between September and October 2020, the Working Group members worked interactively via emails with the Secretariat to prepare the TORs for the Working Group's consultancy on the draft operational guidelines requested by Resolution XIII.9.
8. The Secretariat announced a call for proposals to recruit a suitable consultant to develop the draft operational guidelines. Nine submissions in total were received. The Secretariat reviewed the submissions and analyzed the proposals, focusing on nine selection criteria. The result of this analysis was that Margarita Astralaga of Colombia was selected as the most suitable candidate for the assignment.
9. On January 29 2020, the consultant was introduced to the Group by the Secretariat, at the request of the Working Group's Chair, to assist with the development of the new draft of the guidelines.
10. On February 1, the consultant started work on the assessment of the RRI and the new draft guidelines. On February 11, the Secretariat sent out survey questionnaires (on behalf of the consultant) in three languages to 19 RRI. The Secretariat sent out one reminder to all RRI to respond to the survey and then followed up bilaterally with RRI in each region. The Chair of the Working Group encouraged the RRI coordinators to respond to the questionnaire. By the end of February 28, 15 responses had been received.
11. On March 8 and 24 2021, respectively, the Consultant submitted the first drafts of the RRI assessment and new operational guidelines to the Secretariat. The Working Group's Chair shared the document with the Group's members for comments. Several RRI and contracting

parties commented on the documents, which were included in a table of comments to facilitate the follow-up by the working group. The consultant also incorporated the comments in an updated version of the operational guidelines (comments from: Australia, BlackSea Wet, CWI, MedWet, Panama, RRCEA, RRI-CA, RR CWA, Uruguay, Sweden, Peru, Honduras and Dominican Republic) .

12. Given the response from the members of the RRI Working Group and that comments received were related to the operational guidelines, but not to the assessment conducted by the consultant, the deadline for the review of the assessment was extended. It is emphasized that the proposal of the new operational guidelines is based on the information gathered by the consultant through the surveys that is reflected in the assessment of the RRIs. After receiving input from the members of the Operational Guidelines Working Group, the consultant compiled the comments and prepared a revised version on April 12.
13. In accordance with the TORs of the Working Group, a teleconference was held on April 15, with the following objectives to discuss: a. clarification by the consultant to questions from IRR-WG members, on specific points of the Guidelines or the assessment prepared by the consultant. b. discussion by Working Group members of changes to the operational guidelines or the assessment report and identification of issues not agreed by all parties and c. definition by the Working Group of how the evaluation results should be integrated into the operational guidelines document. The consultant's assessment can be consulted here: <https://www.ramsar.org/document/consultants-ramsar-regional-initiatives-rris-assessment-2016-2019>. Also, as a result of the meeting it was agreed that a small working group would be established (Panama, Colombia, Uruguay, and Costa Rica) to prepare the draft Resolution to be presented to SC59 and to finalize the progress report of the Working Group.
14. With the final input received from the RRI Working Group, the consultant incorporated the changes and agreed comments indicated during the teleconference into a revised version of the operational guidelines that was sent for consideration of the Working Group. The Secretariat prepared a final version of the guidelines with the inputs received which was sent to the Working Group. It is important to mention that the operational guidelines includes the agreed paragraphs where there was no objection, so they are not open for discussion. The paragraphs where there was no consensus are in brackets and will be discussed when the draft Resolution is discussed at the Standing Committee at which all draft Resolutions are addressed.
15. The small working group held a teleconference supported by the Secretariat, with the objective of agreeing the way forward for the preparation of the draft Resolution on Regional Initiatives. The main inputs used were the report of the legal adviser on the legal status of Ramsar Regional Initiatives as per document SC58 Doc.22.3 in line with Decision SC57-29, the Secretariat's legal adviser review (document SC58-22.4) of existing relevant Resolutions and decisions, identifying the ones that are inconsistent with Resolution XIII.9, and the inputs of the Working Group on paragraphs that could be included in the draft Resolution.
16. Annex 1 contains the proposed draft Resolution and operational guidelines for consideration by the Standing Committee and submission to the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Annex 1 to document SC59 Doc.21.1

Draft Resolution XIV. Xx on Ramsar Regional Initiatives 2022-2024

1. RECALLING that Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) under the Ramsar Convention, which include regional centres for training and capacity building and regional networks to facilitate cooperation, are intended as an operational means to provide effective support for improved implementation of the Convention and its strategic plan in specific geographic regions, through voluntary international cooperation on wetland-related issues of common concern;
2. RECALLING that the Conference of the Contracting Parties through different Resolutions has recognized the importance of RRIs in promoting the objectives of the Convention and sought to strengthen links between RRIs and matters that fall within the scope of the Convention;
3. ALSO RECALLING that at its 13th meeting (COP13), the Conference of the Parties instructed the Secretariat's legal advisor to conduct a review of relevant Resolutions, Recommendations and Decisions, identifying those that were inconsistent with Resolution XIII.9 and relevant Decisions, and propose which should be repealed;
4. FURTHER RECALLING that at COP13, the Conference of the Parties through Resolution XIII.9 re-established the Ramsar Regional Initiative Working Group and instructed it to draft new Operational guidelines for RRIs, as well as a draft resolution on RRIs which *inter alia* incorporated the aforementioned list of Resolutions, Recommendations and Decisions to be repealed, and that both were endorsed by SC59;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

5. EXPRESSES its gratitude to the RRI Working Group for their work on drafting new Operational Guidelines for RRIs;
6. ADOPTS the Operational Guidance *for Ramsar Regional Initiatives* contained in Annex 1 of this Resolution to support the implementation of the Convention for the period 2022- 2024 which shall serve as a reference to assess the operation of regional initiatives and their success. This Operational Guidelines supersede the Operational Guidelines adopted in 2016 through Decision SC52-16 Doc SC52-22.
7. REAFFIRMS the effectiveness of regional cooperation through networks and centres, grouped under the term RRIs, in supporting improved implementation of the Convention on Wetlands and its Strategic Plan and Resolutions;
8. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, as appropriate, to invite regional intergovernmental, international and non-governmental organizations, organizations of indigenous peoples and local communities, and transboundary river and groundwater basin organizations, to participate in or collaborate with RRIs;
9. RECOGNIZES the potentiality of cooperation within the framework of IRR in wetlands ecosystems or watershed shared by Contracting Parties that allows a comprehensive vision

of the territory, favoring dialogue, coordination and cooperation between the parties involved;

10. NOTES that dialogue and coordination between Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay regarding the development of an integrated vision for the Pantanal region is underway; and ENCOURAGES the integration of this vision into the RRI for the Conservation and Wise Use of the Plata River Basin in coordination with Argentina and Uruguay.
11. DECIDES that the Conference of the Contracting Parties is to review existing RRIs against the Operational Guidance for Ramsar Regional Initiatives and the criteria set out in this paragraph at [each meeting of]the [COP14] [Conference of the Parties] to determine if they can be endorsed as operating within the framework of the Convention. FURTHER DECIDES that the Standing Committee is to perform this function intersessionally. {The Standing Committee with help of the Secretariat is also to monitor the impact of the new Operational Guidance and suggest possible amendments of major nature to COP15}. The criteria based on Resolution XIII.9 are as follows:
 - a. RRIs must develop written terms of reference which are consistent with relevant Resolutions and Recommendations of the Conference of the Parties and Decisions of the Standing Committee. These terms of reference must cover their own rules of procedure, structure, governance and membership, including the status of the Convention Secretariat's participation in the RRI;
 - b. The governance and financial structures and activities of RRIs must be transparent, accountable, compliant with relevant laws and consistent with relevant Resolutions and Recommendation of the Conference of the Parties and Decisions of the Standing Committee;
 - c. RRIs should undertake tasks related to the implementation of the Convention and its strategic plan in their region and can speak in their own name only, using their own logo only, to avoid any confusion between RRIs, Ramsar Administrative Authorities at the national level and the Secretariat at the international level;
 - d. RRIs must submit to the Secretariat, according to the format in Annex 4 approved by the Standing Committee and on an annual basis:
 - i. details of compliance with sub-paragraphs a, b and c;
 - ii. a report of progress on their work;
 - iii. an end-of year financial summary; and
 - iv. a work plan and budget for the following year.
12. The RRIs that satisfy the Operational Guidelines are approved by the COP or the Standing Committee as operating within the framework of the Convention for the period between two meetings of the COP, and receive the status of a Ramsar Regional Initiative or, if existing, will have their status confirmed.
13. REQUEST Ramsar Regional Initiatives seeking to obtain domestic or international legal personality to inform the Secretariat in order to undertake a risk-benefit analysis (including of legal issues) to the Convention and the Secretariat in relation to the concerned RRI for COP consideration.
14. FURTHER REQUEST, RRIs with current domestic or international legal personality to report to the Secretariat any changes in their legal personality for COP consideration.

15. REQUESTS the Secretariat to provide the Conference of the Parties and Standing Committee with the information obtained under paragraph 11(d) so as to assist these bodies with their reviews of RRIs (as per para 11 and decisions regarding funding (as per paras 22 and 23;
16. INSTRUCTS the Secretariat to prepare a summary assessment of the operations and achievements of the RRIs operating during the period 2021-2024 for consideration by the Standing Committee and submission to COP15;
17. INSTRUCTS all Ramsar Regional Initiatives approved by the Convention to submit to the Standing Committee annual reports on their progress and operations, and specifically on their success in fulfilling the Operational Guidelines and according to paragraph 11 (d);
18. REQUEST the Secretariat to contact RRIs that fail to submit annual reports for one year and request to submit the relevant reports and FURTHER REQUEST the Standing Committee to consider the endorsement of RRIs that have not submitted annual reports for two consecutive years as operating within the framework of the Convention.
19. NOTES that new RRIs that have been endorsed as operating within the framework of the Convention are eligible for start-up financial support from the Ramsar Convention core budget;
20. NOTING that Resolution XIV.x on *Financial and budgetary matters* includes within the Convention core budget for 2022-2024 a budget line “Support to Ramsar Regional Initiatives”, to provide start-up support for the running costs of new RRIs.
21. DECIDES that financial support for Ramsar Regional Initiatives that meet the Operational Guidelines eligible for start-up financial support can be obtained for a period of up to six years in total corresponding to the interval between two meetings of the COP;
22. DECIDES that the levels of financial support from the Convention core budget to eligible RRIs for the years 2022, 2023 and 2024 will be determined annually by the Standing Committee, based on the information submitted by RRIs to the Secretariat in accordance with paragraph 11(d), and informed by the specific recommendations made by the Subgroup on Finance to the Standing Committee;
23. URGES RRIs that receive financial support from the core budget to consider using part of this support to achieve financial sustainability funding through financial support from other sources, including donors that are willing to support RRIs through specific projects and cooperation programmes particularly during the last years in which they qualify for such support;
24. FURTHER ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties and INVITES other potential donors, bilateral or multilateral, to support RRIs, whether or not they are also receiving funding through the Convention’s core budget; and INVITES Contracting Parties that are geographically related to an RRI to consider giving either financial or in kind support, as appropriate;
25. INVITES, the Convention’s International Organization Partners and other stakeholders to partner with and support RRIs in their undertakings, including in particular through capacity building and fundraising efforts;

26. REQUESTS that the RRIs maintain active and regular contact with the Secretariat; and INSTRUCTS the Secretariat to advise RRIs on how to reinforce their capacity and effectiveness, including in relation to the alignment of RRIs with the Convention's Strategic Plan and CEPA Programme;
27. INVITES the Contracting Parties and RRIs to consider the Resolutions in Annex 2 which include paragraphs of relevance to RRIs and REQUESTS the Secretariat to assist RRIs to identify any tasks which remain incomplete;
28. [REAFFIRMS the decision taken by the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties that request the Secretariat, within its existing legal framework and mandate, to assist Contracting Parties, as appropriate, in the administration of non-core funded projects, including, but not limited to, successful fundraising for RRIs; and FURTHER INSTRUCTS Secretariat staff in positions identified in Annex 4 as supported with core funds not to be involved in the day-to-day administration of non-core funded projects, these being the responsibility of any Secretariat staff in positions supported with non-core funds for that specific purpose];
29. FURTHER REQUESTS that the Secretariat continue publishing on the Convention's website information provided by the RRIs, including on-going projects and reports on their successes and work plans;
30. INSTRUCTS the Secretariat to publicize RRIs at the global level as a mechanism to promote international cooperation and support for the implementation of the objectives of the Convention, to complement the efforts of the Ramsar Administrative Authorities and the National Focal Points at the national level;
31. [ENCOURAGES] RRIs to adopt participatory monitoring programs as a strategy of ownership, adaptive management and dissemination of the progress and results of their management;
32. URGES that the RRIs develop within their program of activities, proposals for strengthening capacities in the different areas of interest, [for those involved in the IRR];
33. INSTRUCTS the Secretariat to open the call for proposals for new RRIs, to be endorsed by the Conference of the Parties at COP15 and submit the relevant information for Standing Committee consideration at its meetings before COP15. The request for consideration by the Standing Committee will follow the template attached as annex 1 to the Operational Guidelines.
34. ENDORSES the existing RRIs listed below as operating in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands until COP15:

Four regional Ramsar centres for training and capacity building:

- Ramsar Centre for Eastern Africa (RAMCEA)
- Ramsar Regional Centre for Training and Research in the Western Hemisphere (CREHO)
- Ramsar Regional Centre – Central and West Asia (RRC-CWA)
- Ramsar Regional Centre – East Asia (RRC-EA); and

Sixteen Ramsar networks for regional cooperation:

- Ramsar Regional Initiative for West African Coastal Zone Wetlands (WaCoWet)
- Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Niger River Basin (NigerWet)
- Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Senegal River Basin
- Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of High Andean Wetlands
- Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of the Plata River Basin
- Caribbean Wetlands Ramsar Regional Initiative (CariWet)
- Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of Mangroves and Coral Reefs
- Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Amazon River Basin
- East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership
- Ramsar Regional Initiative for Central Asia
- Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative
- Mediterranean Wetlands Ramsar Regional Initiative (MedWet)
- Carpathian Wetland Ramsar Regional Initiative (CWI)
- Nordic-Baltic Wetlands Ramsar Regional Initiative (NorBalWet)
- Ramsar Regional Initiative on Black and Azov Seas Coastal Wetlands (BlackSeaWet)
- The Southern African Ramsar Regional Initiative (pending consideration of SC59);

35. [URGES the proper articulation between the IRRs in geographical and thematic terms to ensure the implementation of their action plans in an articulated manner];

36. DECIDES that the Resolution and Recommendations in Annex 3 are repealed.

Annex I to the Draft Resolution

Operational Guidelines for Ramsar Regional Initiatives to support the implementation of the Convention

1. Regional Initiatives (RRIs) under the Convention on Wetlands are intended as operational means to provide effective support for an improved implementation of the objectives of the Convention and its Strategic Plan. The Operational Guidelines (OG) are an effort to ensure that the RRIs are indeed actively supporting Contracting Parties with a common interest in a particular area, region or ecosystem, to protect wetlands into the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands framework. They also support risk¹ reduction, providing and visualizing possible actions to be implemented by regions and strengthening the objectives of the Convention in all aspects once these RRIs become operational.
2. Furthermore, the new Operational Guidelines are intended to make clear that neither the Contracting Parties nor the RRIs they are involved in can speak on the behalf of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands; they can represent themselves only. This will help reduce risks for the Convention in every aspect of the operations of the RRIs.
3. The RRIs have various types of governance and coordination approaches, as well as operational and financial management practices. At this time, some of them don't seem to be as strong as they could be.
4. The Operational Guidelines aim at ensuring that the Contracting Parties at COP provide greater recognition and a stronger formal endorsement to those well performing RRIs, based on regular external assessments and audits. This type of recognition will facilitate their efforts in resource mobilization and obtaining more support from third parties, including donors willing to fund regional projects for improved implementation of strategic priorities of the Convention in the various regions. Additionally, it is as important that the COP is made aware of challenges faced by some RRIs.
5. The GO Operational Guidelines should be considered as a guide for the sustainability of IRRs and everything that allows them to ensure their long-term effectiveness.
6. Those proposing new regional initiatives will be encouraged to first assess lessons learned by existing RRIs to avoid duplication of efforts and mistakes. The template for new regional initiatives is attached as annex 1 to this Operational Guidelines.
7. Taking into consideration that there are two main distinctive types of coordination structures² of RRIs, specific paragraphs that only apply to those RRIs with independent Secretariats are presented in Annex 2 of this guidelines.

Chapter 1: The aim and scope of Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs)

8. Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) (have to be endorsed by the Conference of the Parties (COP), or intersessionally by the Standing Committee if they are new and are subject to review at each COP **RRIs** [They] are to support the operational implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan in the geographical area they are covering. RRIs improve implementation of the

¹ An uncertain event or set of events which, should it occur, will have an effect on the achievement of objectives

² 1- RRIs coordinated by a Contracting Party; 2- RRIs coordinated by an independent Secretariat

Convention through international cooperation within the region on wetland-related issues of common concern, involving relevant stakeholders.

9. RRIs could either be physically established centres that have a regional training or capacity building programme, regional cooperation networks with no physical centre, or a combination of both.
10. Geographical regions to be covered by RRIs are defined according to the wetland-related needs of the relevant actors in their region. RRIs are intended to provide lasting structural and operational support to facilitate and improve the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the region concerned.

Chapter 2: Governance and functioning of the RRIs

11. Contracting Parties, have the main responsibility to create, manage, develop, supervise and coordinate the functioning of the RRI and establish their coordinating unit. Much of this responsibility be delegated to a centre or similar.
12. All Contracting Parties that are members of a given RRI, are encouraged to participate in the activities carried out during the year, according to the established workplan. When this is not the case, the coordination body of the RRI will lead a process to promote the active participation of the Contracting Parties.
13. RRIs establish their own governance and advisory mechanisms in order to provide leadership, coordination, guidance and accountability in a transparent and equitable manner. This requires the establishment of a governing body made up of the participating Contracting Parties and other relevant stakeholders, and a coordination body. The coordination body and governance mechanisms of each RRI are defined in its operative rules and [are encouraged to have] should encourage the active participation of all Contracting Parties members of the initiative.
14. The governing body meets regularly, guides, defines mandates, rules and principles of procedure, decides on how different work task for the activities of the RRI are to be distributed, monitors its activities work programme and its resources, and publicly provides all its members with relevant information. The operational procedures are made available to the public for example at the individual RRI website or RRI webpage on the Convention's website.
15. All Contracting Parties who are members of an RRI are encouraged to contribute to the RRI, either by financial and/or in kind resources for each triennium as appropriate.
16. IRRs may request assistance from the Convention Secretariat in order to strengthen their capacity and effectiveness, including through the mobilization of additional resources. The COP must be informed about the support activities that it has requested or possibly received during the triennium.
17. RRIs are encouraged to use the best work tools available for them, (this also include the existing Convention tools (in particular the technical annexes of the resolutions, manuals, guidelines, methods, etc when appropriate). They are to be in contact, where considered fruitful, with Ramsar national focal points for the Convention, including those for CEPA and STRP, of the relevant Parties and when appropriate have these focal points included actively in the work of the RRI.

18. The Secretariat of the Convention and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) may be invited to assist in the review of training modules developed by RRIs to ensure quality and that contents are aligned with approved global tools and are well adapted to regional contexts. The RRIs can also seek assistance from wetland experts, as well as wetland practitioners, for the review of training modules and related publications. On other capacity building activities, details about the number of individuals or organisations that benefitted from the undertaken activities, and results of any evaluations undertaken will be included in the annual reports, to be able to assess impact.
19. RRIs are encouraged to work in synergy with other initiatives and / or projects and / or programmes of other international agreements such as CBD, CCD, CMS, CITES, among others. and to ensure compliance with the activities set out in the annual plans in order to strengthen regional ties and optimize institutional resources.

Chapter 3: Status of the RRIs

20. On-going RRIs are endorsed by the COP. [New RRIs are endorsed at the COP or inter-sessionally by the Standing Committee, provided that their establishment is justified as a response to the needs of the regions and that they comply with existing resolutions decisions on RRIs].

[New RRI must be presented to the COP, or inter-sessionally by Standing Committee, by a Ramsar Convention State Party, which is part of and represents this new RRI, in order to formalize its approval and operation. This establishment must be justified as a response to the regional needs and according to the existing resolution/documents on RRI]

21. RRIs do not form part of the Secretariat of the Convention or of any national authority or organization that may provide them with support or hosting arrangements. The RRIs are encouraged to establish their own identity, which specifies their independence, their status and role. They apply relevant provisions of national legislation and seek to obtain a formal recognition in their host country.
22. RRIs include Contracting Parties and can act on their behalf only by express mandate of their constituents, and in no instance will they be considered as a regional office of the Convention or as spokespersons or representatives of the Secretariat of the Convention
23. RRIs are requested to adopt their own logo and to use it in combination with the Convention logo in accordance with current guidelines.
24. An active RRI website could be useful to provide visibility to the RRI and including evidence of the communication efforts during the previous year in the annual reports would be beneficial.

Chapter 4: Participation in RRIs

25. The Coordination body is encouraged to organize periodic meetings, ensuring timely planning and full involvement of Contracting Party members and the Secretariat of the Convention.
26. [Meetings with the purpose of exchanging experiences every two/three years will be held, with the assistance and advice of the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands. The meetings should involve all members of the RRI and other relevant stakeholders (Ministries, Governmental Organizations, International Organization Partners (IOPs) to the Convention on Wetlands), other non-governmental organizations and civil society, universities, local

communities and the private sector, as well as CEPA and STRP national focal points of the Convention. These meetings should be prepared and announced to the members of the initiative, and to the Secretariat of the Convention, in good time and with concrete objectives and expected results]

27. Effective partnerships with Convention IOPs and other relevant regional or global organisations should be promoted. The governing body should ensure that the planning of the yearly workplan and the strategic plan involves the relevant partners in the annual report submitted to the Secretariat.

Chapter 5: Relation between the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands and the RRIs

28. Effective and frequent communication and coordination between the RRI and the Secretariat is important- RRIs will ensure that the planning of the yearly workplan and the strategic plan involves the Ramsar Secretariat of the Convention along with other key stakeholders.
29. For RRIs with a mandate to support World Wetlands Day, it is recommended they inform the Secretariat of the Convention about the relevant activities organised.

Chapter 6: The role of the RRIs to implement the Convention on Wetlands Strategic Plan

30. The work programme of each RRI is aligned with the approved Strategic Plan of the Convention. The RRIs ensure that their documents are based upon implementing the Convention's Strategic Plan.

[The RRIs ensure that specific goals and targets of the Convention's Strategic Plan are integrated in the annual workplans and RRI strategic plans, as well as clarifying in the annual reports how the initiative has contributed to meeting the goals/targets].

31. -[RRIs that have not contributed effectively to achieving the targets of the Strategic Plan in a given triennium will be reminded by the Standing Committee of the possibility of not being endorsed as RRIs in the succeeding triennium, if they fall short of the requirements].
32. RRIs are encouraged to include specific activities related to CEPA in the annual work programme and/or projects. RRIs are invited to ask different kinds of CEPA experts for advice regarding the works that are related to specific goals and targets of the Convention's Strategic Plan and also to investigate if there are lessons learnt by other RRIs or Contracting Parties having similar wetland conditions or if there are CEPA tools/information that can be re-cycled or slightly adapted, instead of starting their CEPA activities from scratch.

Chapter 7: Financing of the RRIs

35. RRIs have their own systems for accounting and presenting reports, overseen by their governing bodies, unless they are part of one or several of the Contracting Parties accounting and reporting systems.
36. All participating Contracting Parties are encouraged to provide assistance to RRIs, and donors are encouraged to provide funds for their activities, for example through financing provided by specific projects or programmes.
37. The financial section of the annual report includes information on number of Contracting Parties contributing in kind or financial resources to the implementation of the initiative; number of

other partners contributing to the initiative; expenditures against individual activities and results. As well as the amounts of the financial contributions.

38. RRIs take the necessary measures to establish financial sustainability with resources allowing for the development of their activities over the long term.
39. If lacking reliable resources RRIs are encouraged to prepare a resource mobilization strategy to facilitate the implementation of their annual workplans. RRI can request support to the Ramsar Secretary to help their effort to find external financial resources.
40. [The RRIs, receiving core budget from the Convention on Wetlands, are requested to submit the financial audit reports to the Standing Committee as part of the annual report.]
41. Each COP establishes a core budget line to support new RRIs over the coming triennium. The Standing Committee allocates these funds annually, in response to specific requests, to new RRIs that fulfil the Operational Guidelines.
42. The RRI is expected to be self-sufficient after a few years have received financial assistance provided from the core budget of the Convention.
43. RRIs support the Contracting Parties in the development of project proposals in the framework of the work plan of the RRI to implement the Strategic Plan aiming at obtaining financial support from donors.

Chapter 8: Reporting and evaluation of the RRIs

44. RRIs are requested to submit to the Ramsar Secretariat annual reports on progress regarding the workplan implementation and financial status of the past year according to the format adopted by Standing Committee. The RRIs that are receiving financial support from the Convention are requested to submit the workplan implementation and costs incurred in the past year, together with estimated costs, potential sources of funding and work plans for the coming year, according to the format adopted by Standing Committee. A summary of Convention and other funding sources is reported. Annual reports must reach the Secretariat in time for the preparation of the documents for the annual meeting of Standing Committee.
45. The draft on the annual report and the work program for the coming year has to be endorsed by all the Administrative Authorities of the Contracting Parties members of the RRI for consultation, in order to be sent to the Secretariat.
47. The annual report format is attached as annex 3 (this Annex will be attached once the Standing Committee approves the reporting template in document Standing Committee SC58-22.2 See https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/sc58-22.2_secretariat_report_rris_e.pdf)

Appendix 1 to the *Operational Guidelines*
Template for proposed new regional initiatives

1. Name of RRI
2. Contracting Parties who are members of the initiative shall provide a letter of commitment before every COP, indicating their financial contribution to the initiative, as well as designating the official in the Government that will be the focal point for it during the following triennium.
3. Description of expected coordination body and potential host
4. Type of RRI: Regional Centre or Regional network, or a combination – thereof, with a brief description
5. Objectives of the RRI
6. Describe the main objective to be reached with this RRI indicating the geographical area, region and/or ecosystems to be covered
7. Please clearly identify the Goals and Targets of the Convention's Strategic Plan that will be supported through the RRI
8. Please include names of relevant IOPs and other NGOs that would like to participate in the initiative
9. Please name other potentially relevant partners and describe how they have participated in the preparation of the workplan and what role you expect them to assume if the RRI is endorsed
10. Potential sources of funding for the RRI
11. A Workplan and budget for the following three years (CHF/year) – as an attachment
12. Confirm whether you plan to open an independent Bank account for the initiative.

Appendix 2 to the *Operational Guidelines*
Special requirements for RRIs with independent Secretariats

1. RRIs are encouraged to assess compliance with the existing ToR/statutes every three years, inform the Administrative Authorities for the Contracting Parties being members of the RRI and do updates the TOR/Status based on the results of the assessments.
2. The Secretariat of the Convention should be fully involved in the annual meetings of the coordinating unit of RRIs
3. Each RRI coordination body should have as a minimum one working meeting per year with the relevant Secretariat staff. The purpose of these meetings should be to keep the information among the members of the RRI updated, regarding the follow-up of the agenda of their activities and the budget, in order to agree on the annual report to be submitted to the Ramsar Secretariat.
4. Financial audited reports for all cash contributions received are shared with the Secretariat on a yearly basis.

Annex II to the Draft Resolution

Other Resolutions and Recommendations that include paragraphs concerning RRIs that are still in force and of relevance to RRIs

	Relevant content	Notes
COP13		
XIII.2: Financial and budgetary matters	<p>4 NOTING WITH GRATITUDE the additional voluntary financial contributions made by many Contracting Parties, including those from Contracting Parties of Africa specifically earmarked for African Regional Initiatives (in accordance with paragraph 23 of Resolution X.2 on <i>Financial and budgetary matters</i>), and also the contributions made by non-governmental organizations and private companies for activities undertaken by the Secretariat;</p> <p>24 REQUESTS the Secretariat to provide to the Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) in Africa, on an annual basis, the available balance of the African voluntary contribution fund; and INVITES those RRIs to submit requests to the Secretariat as part of the reports to access available funds in accordance with the provisions of Resolution XIII.9 on <i>Ramsar Regional Initiatives 2019-2021</i>;</p> <p>26 REQUESTS the Secretariat within its existing legal framework and mandate, to assist, as appropriate, Contracting Parties in the administration of non-core funded projects, including, but not limited to successful fund-raising for Regional Initiatives; and FURTHER INSTRUCTS Secretariat staff, identified in Annex 4, supported with core funds, not to be involved in the day- to-day administration of non-core funded projects as this role would be the responsibility of any Secretariat staff supported with non-core funds for that specific purpose.</p>	
XIII.5 Review of the fourth Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention	11 EXPRESSING APPRECIATION for the support provided to Contracting Parties to implement the Strategic Plan by the Ramsar Regional Initiatives, intergovernmental organizations, International Organization Partners and non-governmental organizations; and	
XIII.7 Enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental	1 RECALLING that Resolution XI.1, on <i>Institutional hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat</i> , in paragraphs 17 and 18, instructs the Standing Committee and Contracting Parties to develop strategies that explore the accommodation of	

	Relevant content	Notes
agreements and other international institutions	UN languages into the Convention, the elevation of the Convention's visibility and stature, including <i>inter alia</i> through enhancing high-level political engagement in its work at national, regional, and global levels, the enhancement of synergies with multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and other international entities including through regional initiatives, and the increased involvement in the initiatives of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP);	
XIII.15 Cultural values and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities and their contribution to climate-change mitigation and adaptation in wetlands	<p>16 ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, the Ramsar Convention Secretariat and Ramsar Regional Initiatives, and INVITES interested organizations and networks, to protect, support and promote the use of cultural values, traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities in adapting to the increasing negative impacts of climate change, taking into consideration vulnerable groups, communities and ecosystems;</p> <p>22 REQUESTS the Secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, and INVITES Contracting Parties, Ramsar Regional Initiatives, interested organizations and networks, to continue to undertake enabling activities for the effective consideration of the cultural values of wetlands within wetland protection and management;</p>	
Resolution XIII.8 Future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention for 2019-2021	<p>Annex 3</p> <p>Bodies and organizations invited to participate as observers in the meetings and processes of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel for the 2019-2021 triennium</p> <p>...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific and Technical Network of the Mediterranean Wetlands Ramsar Regional Initiative (MedWet) <p>Annex 4</p>	

	Relevant content	Notes
	<p>Guidelines for developing requests to the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) for its future work programmes</p> <p>...</p> <p>2 Any Contracting Party, Ramsar Regional Initiative, the STRP, and multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) that are proposing a joint submission may develop a proposal for consideration.</p>	
XIII.22 Wetlands in West Asia	<p>11 ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties in the West Asia region to consider leveraging existing collaboration and regional initiatives within the context of sustainable development;</p> <p>14 REQUESTS the Ramsar Regional Centre – Central and West Asia to follow up the provisions of the present Resolution, within the framework of its mandate, and report to the Conference of the Contracting Parties.</p>	
XIII.24 The enhanced conservation of coastal marine turtle habitats and the designation of key areas as Ramsar Sites	<p>22 ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to review their Ramsar Site management plans to seek to ensure they include marine turtle conservation actions, as appropriate; and RECOMMENDS enhancement of synergies and better coordination with Ramsar Regional Initiatives and existing networks rather than establishment of new arrangements;</p>	
COP12		
XII.2 The Ramsar Strategic Plan	Multiple references throughout	
XII.5 New framework for delivery of scientific and technical advice and guidance on the Convention	<p>Role and responsibilities of the STRP members</p> <p>12 The main collective responsibilities of the Panel members are to:</p> <p>i) establish the scope, deliverables and approach to delivery for each assigned task, including through scoping workshops as appropriate, and in so doing ensure input from the network of STRP National Focal Points, Ramsar Regional Initiatives, and any other relevant organizations;</p>	

	Relevant content	Notes
XII.9 The Ramsar Convention's Programme on communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness (CEPA) 2016-2024	<p>13 INVITES all Contracting Parties, as suggested in Resolutions VII.9, VIII.31, X.8 and in the CEPA Programme 2016-2024, to formulate their Wetland CEPA Action Plans (at national, subnational, catchment, or local levels) for priority activities that address international, regional, national, and local needs, and as appropriate to provide copies of these to the Ramsar Secretariat as a part of their national reporting, in order for these to be shared as examples of good practice, and INSTRUCTS the Secretariat to provide relevant information to the Regional Initiatives on priorities and activities, to support delivery of the CEPA Programme;</p> <p>23 INVITES the IOPs, Ramsar Regional Initiatives and other organizations with which the Ramsar Secretariat has collaborative agreements to support the implementation of the CEPA Programme at the global, regional, national or local levels, as appropriate, with the expertise, networks, skills and resources they have at their disposal;</p> <p>See also:</p> <p>Annex 1 The Ramsar Convention's Programme on communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness (CEPA) 2016-2024</p>	
XII.11 Peatlands, climate change and wise use: Implications for the Ramsar Convention	<p>20 NOTING the Policy Brief on <i>Peatlands, climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation</i> and the report <i>Peatlands and Climate Change in a Ramsar context – a Nordic Baltic Perspective</i> developed under the Ramsar regional initiative NorBalWet as inspiration for other Ramsar regional initiatives and Parties, as appropriate;</p>	
XII.12 Call to action to ensure and protect the water requirements of wetlands for the present and the future	<p>21 WELCOMES the process carried out in Mexico for the creation of water reserves for wetlands, described in the Annex to this Resolution;</p> <p>22 ENCOURAGES the Contracting Parties to consider the possibility of using Mexico's approach, as appropriate, to identify the opportunities to act preventatively, and adapting it as necessary in order to address national and</p>	

	Relevant content	Notes
	regional conditions and circumstances, within the framework of existing regional initiatives and commitments and within the context of sustainable development;	
COP11		
XI.6 Partnerships and synergies with Multilateral Environmental Agreements and other institutions	35 REQUESTS the Secretariat to continue to review its memoranda of cooperation with other global and regional environment agreements and other organizations with a view to reinvigorating those most likely to be beneficial to the work of the Convention and its international profile within the time and resources available, taking into account the approach and priorities established in the “Strategic Framework for Partnerships for the Ramsar Convention”, and FURTHER ENCOURAGES the Secretariat to continue to establish and strengthen partnerships and closer working relations with intergovernmental regional and subregional groups, notably with regional and subregional organizations and especially with Regional Initiatives, with a view to enhancing the role and visibility of the Convention in those regions;	
XI.10 Wetlands and energy issues	<p>14 WELCOMES the Guidance for addressing the implications for wetlands of policies, plans and activities in the energy sector annexed to this Resolution, and INVITES Contracting Parties to make use of this guidance, adapting it as necessary to suit national conditions and circumstances, within the frameworks of existing regional initiatives and commitments;</p> <p>15..... and REQUESTS the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), the CEPA Oversight Panel, the Regional Initiatives and Contracting Parties to support, resources permitting, Contracting Parties training and capacity building efforts;</p>	Instructed that no specific request made to RRIIs regarding this issue. Assuming this resolution is not time bound to 2012-15 cycle (see XI.17, which alludes to this), then para 15 still in force.
XI.11 Principles for the planning and management of urban and peri-urban wetlands	27 REQUESTS the Ramsar Secretariat and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) to strengthen collaborative initiatives with UN-Habitat and continue to develop collaboration with Ramsar Regional Initiatives, the CBD, Ramsar’s IOPs, ICLEI and other appropriate urban stakeholders, including individual cities, in order to foster projects that develop demonstration sites which both benefit urban local communities and promote the wise use of wetlands;	Instructed that there has been no follow up with RRIIs regarding this issue. Assuming this resolution is not time bound to 2012-15 cycle (see XI.17, which

	Relevant content	Notes
		alludes to this), then para 27 still in force.
XI.14 Climate change and wetlands: implications for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands	<p>32 ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties and relevant organizations to undertake studies of the role of the conservation and/or restoration of both forested and non-forested wetlands in relation to: i) climate change mitigation, including the role of wetlands in carbon storage and sequestration, greenhouse gas emissions from degrading wetlands, avoidance of greenhouse gas emissions through removals of wetland carbon sinks, and ii) adaptation to climate change, including water regulation at local and regional scales, such as flood risk reduction, water supply and storage, and reducing the impacts of sea level rise and extreme weather events, including extreme rainfall situations; and to cooperate, within Regional Initiatives or other regional cooperation fora, in developing and disseminating knowledge about the results, and INVITES Contracting Parties and other organizations to make their findings available to the Ramsar Secretariat, the Secretariat of the UNFCCC, and other relevant bodies through existing reporting processes;</p> <p>35 REQUESTS the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP):</p> <p>...</p> <p>iv) in conjunction with the Secretariat and Ramsar Regional Initiative Networks and Centres, to collaborate with relevant international organizations and conventions, within their respective mandates, to further investigate the potential contribution of wetland ecosystems to climate change mitigation and adaptation through:</p> <p>a) preparing advice on assessing social resilience and vulnerability of wetlands to climate change, to complement the existing advice on assessing the biophysical vulnerability of a wetlands to climate change (Ramsar Technical Report No. 5/CBD Technical Series No. 57);</p>	<p>Instructed that there has not been any specific request to RRIs to report on matters referred to in para 32.</p> <p>Instructed that in 2012 the STRP produced a briefing note no climate change (item b), however not much progress on the other items in the 2012-15 triennium.</p> <p>Assuming this resolution is not time bound to 2012-15 cycle (see XI.17, which alludes to this), then paras 32 and 35 still in force.</p>

	Relevant content	Notes
	<p>b) preparing advice on ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change for coastal and inland wetlands; and</p> <p>c) reviewing any relevant advice provide by other MEAs, in particular the outcomes of CBD COP-11;</p> <p>without pre-empting any future decisions of the UNFCCC;</p>	
COP10		
X.3 The Changwon Declaration on human well-being and wetlands	14 FURTHER STRONGLY URGES the Standing Committee, the STRP, the Ramsar Secretariat, CEPA National Focal Points, regional initiatives operating under the framework of the Convention, the International Organization Partners (IOPs) and others to utilise the “Changwon Declaration” in their future work and establishment of priorities, and also to use their own means and all other relevant opportunities actively to promote the Declaration;	
X.15 Describing the ecological character of wetlands, and data needs and formats for core inventory: harmonized scientific and technical guidance	4 WELCOMES the guidance on “Describing the ecological character of wetlands, and harmonized data formats for core inventory” provided in the annex to this Resolution, and URGES Contracting Parties to make good use of it as appropriate, adapting it as necessary to suit national conditions and circumstances, within the frameworks of existing regional initiatives and commitments and in the context of sustainable development;	Instructed that no follow up on whether RRI are using guidance document.
X.17 Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment: updated scientific and technical guidance	8 WELCOMES the guidelines on Biodiversity-Inclusive Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Impact Assessment provided in the annex to this Resolution, and INVITES Contracting Parties to make good use of them as appropriate, including within the frameworks of existing regional initiatives and commitments and in the context of sustainable development, without prejudice to the practices already established by the Parties;	Instructed that no follow up on whether RRI are using guidance document.
X.19 Wetlands and river basin management: consolidated scientific and technical guidance	5 NOTES the “Consolidated Guidance for integrating wetland conservation and wise use into river basin management” provided in the annex to this Resolution, and INVITES Contracting Parties to make good use of it as appropriate, adapting it as necessary to suit national conditions and circumstances, within the frameworks of existing regional initiatives and commitments, in the context of sustainable development and in accordance with national institutions and legal frameworks;	Instructed that no follow up on whether RRI are using guidance document.

	Relevant content	Notes
COP9		
IX.1 Additional scientific and technical guidance for implementing the Ramsar wise use concept	7 WELCOMES the frameworks, guidelines and other advice provided as annexes C, D, and E to this Resolution and URGES Contracting Parties to make good use of them as appropriate, adapting them as necessary to suit national conditions and circumstances and within the frameworks of existing regional initiatives and commitments and in the context of sustainable development;	Instructed that no follow up on whether RRI are using guidance document.
IX.19 The importance of regional wetland symposia in effectively implementing the Ramsar Convention	15 RECOMMENDS that Contracting Parties, international NGOs, and other relevant scientific and technical organizations consider the usefulness of establishing similar periodic regional scientific and technical fora where they do not already exist, drawing on the experiences of the Asian Wetland Symposia, as a means of increasing scientific and technical support for the implementation of the Convention including, <i>inter alia</i> , any regional initiatives established under the Convention.	
COP7		
XII.19 Guidelines for international cooperation under the Ramsar Convention	No reference to regional initiatives but this resolution is cited throughout other resolutions concerning RRIs.	

Annex III to the Draft Resolution

The following Resolution and Recommendations related to Ramsar Regional Initiative are repealed:

Resolution XII.8

Resolution XI.5

Resolution X.6

Resolution IX.7

Resolution VIII.43

Resolution VIII.41

Resolution VIII.30

Resolution VII.26

Resolution VII.22

Recommendation VI.11

Recommendation V.14

Annex 2 to document SC59 Doc.21.1
Work Plan for the Ramsar Regional Initiatives Working Group

Timeline, key activities and outputs

Date: (Consider adjusting the schedule according to the proposed dates for SC58 and SC59; please note the need to adjust the following timelines below)	Objective
July 2020	Video meeting of the Working Group: to discuss the subjects for review of the TORs and work plan.
August 2020	If necessary, a video meeting to agree on the final version of the TORs and work plan.
August 2020	Request support from the Secretariat for the preparation of the TORs of the consultancy by the Working Group.
August /September 2020	Finalize the necessary actions to hire the Consultant. Includes contributions from the Working Group to facilitate the task of consult's tasks.
October 2020	Acknowledgment and discussion of the final version of the TORs for the consultancy and planning for presentation to the members of the Standing Committee for approval at SC58 (by email and/or videoconference).
After approval by SC58:	
To be decided by the Working Group	Consultant selection process begins. Appointment of the Consultant and initial scoping meeting between the Consultant and the Working Group to discuss review issues and work schedule (via teleconference).
To be decided by the Working Group	Presentation of the work plan by the Consultant by email for approval. Validation process by the Working Group begins.
To be decided by the Working Group	Start of the Consultant's activities in accordance with the work plan and the schedule approved by the Working Group.
According to the approved schedule	Working Group video meeting with the Consultant to discuss the first progress report and next steps.
According to the approved schedule	Discussion by the Working Group on the results of the Consultant and next steps (by teleconference and email exchange).
According to SC59 date (May 2021)	
5 months before SC59	Working Group meeting - to discuss work progress (teleconference).
3 months before SC59	Meeting of the Working Group with the Consultant to discuss the final report and the preparation of the annex to the draft resolution taking into account the principles listed in paragraph 8 of Resolution XIII.9 (may be by teleconference if there is no possibility of face-to-face meeting).
2 months before SC59	Presentation by the Working Group of the report to the Secretariat for SC59.
At SC59	Presentation by the Working Group of the final report.