

## Report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel

### Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. take note of the report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP); and
- ii. consider for submission to the Conference of Contracting Parties the STRP's recommendation to update Criterion 6 of the Ramsar Criteria regarding the use of population estimates according to Decision SC58-06.

### Introduction

1. The present report covers the work of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), from the publishing of document SC58 Doc.19 *Report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel* on 29 May 2020 to 28 April 2021. The report provides both an overview and selected highlights of the work completed during this period.
2. In particular, this report of the Chair of the STRP covers:
  - a. The 24th meeting of the STRP (STRP24);
  - b. Progress with the delivery of the STRP work plan 2019-2021
    - i. Highest priority tasks and steps for their completion;
    - ii. Medium and lower priority tasks; and
    - iii. Ad-hoc advisory tasks and other requests;
  - d. STRP participation in global meetings;
  - e. STRP recommendations in response to the request from Standing Committee decision SC58-06 on the use of population estimates under Criterion 6 (Annex 1); and
  - f. Information on the STRP's preparation of the list of future scientific and technical priorities, in line with Resolution XII.5, Annex 1, para. 45 (Annex 2).

### Meetings of the STRP

#### *24th meeting of the STRP*

3. In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Management Working Group (MWG) decided to cancel STRP23, which was scheduled to take place from 16 to 20 March 2020, in the interest of

public health and safety. A number of virtual calls were held for each of the highest priority tasks with the working groups established at STRP22.<sup>1</sup>

4. As face-to-face meetings remain unlikely for the near future, a virtual STRP meeting (STRP24) will take place on 29 April 2021. The purpose of the meeting will be to inform the Panel and STRP National Focal Points about the progress accomplished during the triennium, the role of the STRP in reviewing scientific and technical Draft Resolutions for COP14 and steps to convene the next Panel for the 2022-2024 triennium.

## **Update on progress with the STRP work plan 2019-2021**

### Highest priority tasks

#### *Global Wetland Outlook (GWO) – special edition 2021:*

5. The Standing Committee at its 57th meeting (SC57) instructed the Panel to align the GWO with the theme of the 50th anniversary of the Convention. Given that the theme of the 50th Anniversary was unknown until late 2020, the Management Working Group (MWG) had advised the Panel to start drafting and to bring the draft in line with the theme once known.
6. Accordingly, following the announcement of the theme—wetlands are important—and further instructions from the MWG in November 2020, the Panel has refocused the scope of the draft to highlight the multiple values of wetlands and the evolution of this concept over time (i.e., from habitat to waterfowl to disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation and adaptation). The draft will also highlight the increasing awareness of the benefits of being outdoors and in closer contact with nature (including for health, recreation and wellbeing).
7. Work from the other highest priority tasks below will feed into the GWO. The STRP will submit a final draft to the Secretariat in June 2021.

#### *Wetlands and sustainable agriculture (task 1.2):*

8. A consultancy report, produced by consultant Anne van Dam (IHE Delft Institute for Water Education), has been completed. Building on the report, a working group, led by Hugh Robertson, has drafted a Briefing Note and a Policy Brief, both of which will be submitted to the Secretariat for production the second week March 2021.

#### *Peatland rewetting/restoration (task 2.2)*

9. A draft Ramsar Technical Report on peatland rewetting and restoration, including tropical peatlands, drafted by consultant Hans Joosten (Greifswald Mire Centre) has been completed. The consultant also drafted a practitioner-oriented Briefing Note deriving from the report, which is currently being reviewed. Both drafts will be submitted to the Secretariat in early March 2021.

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<sup>1</sup> The four STRP highest priority tasks (as designated by SC57) are: (1) Global Wetland Outlook (GWO): Special edition for the 50th anniversary of the Convention on Wetlands; (2) Task 1.2 (Wetlands and sustainable agriculture): Compiling and reviewing positive and negative impacts of agricultural practises on wetlands including extent of changes in area from agricultural land conversion since 1970s, and how adverse impacts can be avoided in the future; (3) Task 2.2 (Peatland re-wetting/ restoration): Elaborating on practical experiences of restoration methods for tropical peatlands; (4) Task 5.1 (Wetlands and blue carbon): Desktop study of coastal blue carbon ecosystems in Ramsar Sites (consistent with relevant IPCC guidelines).

10. A working group, led by Lars Dinesen, has produced a draft Policy Brief, currently undergoing review and to be submitted to the Secretariat for production on the second week of March 2021.
11. Funds to help with the delivery of this task have been generously provided by the Government of Norway, for which the STRP is very grateful.

*Wetlands and blue carbon (task 5.1):*

12. A desktop review of coastal blue carbon ecosystems in Ramsar Sites, drafted by consultants Silvestrum Associates, was completed in August 2020.
13. A working group, led by Siobhan Fennessy, has drafted a Briefing Note, based on the desktop review, which has been peer reviewed. The desktop review and derived Briefing Note correspond to the Contracting Parties' request to the STRP in Resolution XIII.14, para.15(a).
14. Funds to help with the delivery of this task have been generously provided by the Government of Norway, for which the STRP is very grateful.
15. Regarding phase two of this task (sub-paragraphs 15 (b), (c) and (d) of Resolution XIII.14<sup>2</sup>), the Group recommends, as outlined in its work plan, developing terms of reference (TORs) for undertaking such work in the future, given the limited capacity, resources and time to do so this triennium. The consultancy report for Task 5.1 (a) will help inform the TORs of these tasks, as follows:
  - 5.1 (b): By completing Task 5.1a, a start will be made on compiling this database for carbon stocks. Once Task 5.1(a) is finalized, we will evaluate what needs to be done to accomplish this task using the IPCC guidelines and will continue to build the database, particularly for greenhouse gas emissions and carbon dynamics. By the end of the triennium, TORs describing the plan for finalizing this task will be completed, with the expectation that Task 5.1(b) can be finished early next triennium.
  - 5.1 (c): Detailed TORs will be developed for this task. This will also build on Task 5.1 (a) and the information on the extent and condition of blue carbon ecosystems across Wetlands of International Importance. At the end of the triennium, the Panel will identify the possible suite of ecosystem services provided by blue carbon wetlands (including climate change and adaptation benefits) and begin a desktop evaluation of any methods (including rapid methods) currently in use that could be used to prioritize sites for conservation and restoration.

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<sup>2</sup> The text from the tasks in the Resolution is as follows:

b) reviewing and analysing regional modelling of carbon stocks, greenhouse gas emissions and carbon dynamics in coastal blue-carbon ecosystems and providing information, as appropriate, to the IPCC to inform future updates to the Wetlands Supplement;

c) developing guidance for prioritizing coastal blue-carbon ecosystems for conservation and restoration that includes inter alia: climate change mitigation and adaptation benefits; the range of other potential ecosystem benefits and services; and assessment of costs relative to benefits; and

d) reviewing and, as appropriate, updating existing guidance on the preparation of plans for conservation, restoration and sustainable management of coastal blue-carbon ecosystems at Ramsar Sites where such a review could include development of case studies with regional experts to illustrate how guidance has been applied.

- 5.1 (d): Draft TORs will be developed for this task before the end of the triennium.

#### Medium and lower priority tasks

16. Given that STRP members have reported having limited capacity, the MWG instructed the Panel to focus its capacity and resources on the highest priority tasks. However, it is worth recalling that the STRP delivered task 2.5, which called for the development of terms of reference for the Ramsar Culture Network (RCN), a medium priority task, to Standing Committee at SC57.
17. It is worth noting that the Governments of Norway and Finland generously provided funds to support the delivery of task 4.1, *Develop guidance on integrating gender issues in the implementation of the Convention*. However, the MWG instructed the Panel to focus on its highest priority tasks and asked the Secretariat to assist with moving the task forward. The STRP is very grateful for the support of the Governments of Norway and Finland.

#### Ad-hoc advisory tasks and other requests

##### *Application of Criterion 6—use of population estimates*

18. The Secretariat requested the STRP's advice in October 2019 on the use of population estimates when applying Criterion 6 for the designation and update of Wetlands of International Importance, after receiving a request for advice from the Government of Australia on the matter. Subsequently, during its intersessional process for its 58th meeting (SC58), the Standing Committee through Decision SC58-06 requested the STRP to provide a proposal to update Criterion 6 of the Ramsar Criteria regarding the use of population estimates, for the Committee to consider for submission to the Conference of Contracting Parties.
19. A core group of STRP experts, led by Mr David Stroud, was established. Their recommendations were circulated to the full Panel and are available, for consideration by SC59, in Annex 1.

##### *Wetland inventories—toolkit*

20. Former STRP Chair Mr David Stroud provided comments to the Secretariat, on behalf of the Panel, during the development of a wetland inventories toolkit for Contracting Parties, which the Secretariat integrated.

#### **Participation in meetings of technical bodies of other multilateral environmental agreements and other events**

##### *16th Meeting of the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP) and Bureau of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)*

21. The STRP Chair participated in the 16th Meeting of the MEP, held virtually from 2 February to 2 March 2021. The Chair participated in the sessions opened to observers (16, 22 and 23 February), and presented Ramsar work related to IPBES assessment, in particular the GWO.
22. The STRP Chair participated in an online panel discussion, organized by the Secretariat, for World Wetlands Day 2021 on Monday 1 February 2021. The STRP Chair highlighted the urgent policy recommendations needed to ensure that wetlands remain an important source of freshwater.

23. The STRP Chair participated online in the 16th Meeting of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) Technical Committee, which took place from 25 to 29 January 2021.

#### **Future scientific and technical priorities**

24. After consultation with STRP members and the Secretariat, the STRP Chair recommends keeping the current Thematic Work Areas, adopted by Contracting Parties in Resolution XII.5 (see document SC59 Doc.26 *Draft resolution on the future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention for 2022-2024*). Additionally, the STRP recommends consideration of a list of future scientific and technical priorities (Annex 2)). Each priority falls under a Thematic Work Area, based on the Strategic Plan of the Convention, COP13 Resolutions, international processes of relevance to the Convention and Contracting Parties' needs.

## Annex 1

### The application of quantitative criteria to select Ramsar Sites

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 There are three quantitative Criteria for the selection of Ramsar Sites: Criterion 5 (>greater than 20,000 waterbirds regularly occurring), Criterion 6 (>1% of a waterbird biogeographic population regularly occurring), and Criterion 9 (the same formulation as for Criterion 6 but for non-avian, wetland-dependent animal populations). The advice in this document concerns only the application of Criterion 6, which states that "A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% or greater of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird".
- 1.2 Criterion 6 has been used to select 867 Ramsar Sites (generally in combination with other Criteria), over 35% of all Ramsar Sites.
- 1.3 A Party has raised the issue of whether, in the designation of a Ramsar Site, it is possible to use 1% thresholds for the application of Criterion 6 that are not published in Wetlands International's *Waterbird Population Estimates (WPE)*, where other data on a biogeographical population size are deemed to be more contemporary and accurate. STRP's views on this issue have been sought.
- 1.4 The background to the issue is summarised in section 2 below by way of introduction. The specific question is straightforward and is addressed in section 3. However, the situation that has caused the issue to arise is more complicated and is addressed in section 4. Finally, in section 5 we make recommendations as to how the situation could be resolved in the future.

#### 2. Background to Ramsar's quantitative criteria

- 2.1 The history of the two criteria related to waterbirds (currently Criteria 5 and 6) is described by Matthews (1993)<sup>3</sup>. Given the initial motivation of the Convention as a policy tool for the conservation of the habitats of waterbirds, it is not surprising that these criteria received much early attention. Essentially, they capture two related, but different attributes of importance of a wetland: absolute numbers present (Criterion 5) and proportionate importance for a single population (Criterion 6).
- 2.2 Criterion 6 has been an effective and widely adopted means of identifying wetlands of international importance for waterbirds (Atkinson-Willes *et al.* 1982)<sup>4</sup>. It works only for those waterbirds that tend to congregate, a desirable feature because such species will, by definition, be those dependent on a relatively small proportion of total territory and therefore be vulnerable to changes on that limited area.

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<sup>3</sup> Matthews, G.V.T. (1993). The Ramsar Convention on wetlands: its history and development. Ramsar Convention Bureau, Switzerland. <https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/lib/Matthews-history.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Atkinson-Willes, G.L., Scott, D.A. & Prater, A.J. (1982). Criteria for selecting wetlands of international importance. In Proceedings of the conference on the conservation of wetlands of international importance especially as waterfowl habitat. Cagliari, Italy, 24-29 November 1980, pp. 1017-1042. Supplemento alle Ricerche di Biologia della Selvaggina, 81 (1).

- 2.3 Application of Criterion 6 depends on contemporary information on population sizes both at individual sites but importantly at biogeographic-scale for the calculation of 1% thresholds. Such data needs have proved highly stimulating to waterbird monitoring worldwide, notably through the International Waterbird Census.
- 2.4 A first comprehensive list of population sizes and formal thresholds for all waterbirds was presented by the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Institute (IWRB), as an Information Paper to COP 5 in 1993 and published subsequently (Rose & Scott 1994<sup>5</sup>). Resolution 5.9<sup>6</sup> established the application by Parties of standardised waterbird population estimates as the basis for the use of the 1% criterion and requested IWRB to prepare further updates to WPE. This was undertaken and WPE is now in its fifth edition and exists as a searchable on-line database maintained by Wetlands International (Table 1). However, without funding from the Convention, the timetable anticipated at the process' outset of bringing a triennial update to each COP has not proved possible, and *ad hoc* editions have been produced as donor funding has permitted.

Table 1. The publication of Waterbird Population Estimates

<b>Waterbird Population Estimate edition</b>	<b>Citation</b>	<b>Format</b>
WPE 1	Rose & Scott 1994	Hard copy, 102 pp
WPE 2	Rose & Scott 1997	Hard copy, 106 pp
WPE 3	Delany & Scott 2002	Hard copy, 226 pp
WPE 4	Delany & Scott 2006	Hard copy, 239 pp
WPE 5	Mundkur & Nagy 2012	Online searchable database <a href="http://wpe.wetlands.org/">http://wpe.wetlands.org/</a> ; 24 pp summary report

- 2.5 Accessibility of increasingly good data for WPE stimulated international discussion about how frequently 1% thresholds should be updated. Conclusions of a 1994 international workshop on this topic co-convened UK and Denmark (Rose & Stroud 1994<sup>7</sup>) were presented to Ramsar COP6 (Stroud 1996<sup>8</sup>) and adopted by Resolution VI.4,<sup>9</sup> which established a schedule of updates for 1% thresholds and “CALLS ON Contracting Parties to use these estimates and thresholds, upon their publication, as a basis for designation of sites for the List of Wetlands of International Importance”.

<sup>5</sup> Rose, P.M. & Scott, D.A. (1994). *Waterfowl population estimates*. IWRB Special Publication 29. IWRB. Slimbridge, U.K.

<sup>6</sup> Ramsar Convention. (1993). *Resolution 5.9: Application of the Ramsar Criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance*. 5th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, Kushiro, Japan, 9-16 June 1993. [https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/resolution\\_5.9.pdf](https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/resolution_5.9.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Rose, P. & Stroud, D.A. (1994). Estimating international waterfowl populations: current activity and future directions. *Wader Study Group Bulletin* 73, 19-26.  
<https://sora.unm.edu/sites/default/files/journals/iwsgb/n073/p00019-p00026.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Stroud, D.A. (1996). Estimating international waterbird populations: use of Criterion 3(c). Pp. 37-44. In *Proceedings of the 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands. Brisbane, Australia, 19-27 March 1996. Technical Sessions E and F*. Ramsar Bureau, Switzerland.

<sup>9</sup> Ramsar Convention. (1996). *Resolution VI.4: Adoption of population estimates for operation of the specific criteria based on waterfowl*. Proceedings of the 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, Brisbane, Australia, 19-27 March 1996.  
[https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/res/key\\_res\\_vi.04e.pdf](https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/res/key_res_vi.04e.pdf).

- 2.6 Subsequently, Ramsar Resolution VIII.38<sup>10</sup> further recognised WPE as the definitive source of 1% thresholds and “URGES all Contracting Parties to use appropriate 1% thresholds contained in the third edition of *Waterbird Population Estimates* as the official and consistent basis for their application of Criterion 6 of the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* for the designation of Ramsar sites during the 2003-2005 triennium”. It also encouraged the taxonomic scope of WPE to be expanded to include seabirds.
- 2.7 From the outset of the WPE process established under Ramsar, it was recognised that it was desirable to publish official 1% thresholds only periodically<sup>11</sup>. This gave clarity for government and other decision-makers as to which data to use at any one time. It also facilitated the administrative process as to the generation of new editions of *WPE*. The recommended basic nine-year update cycle for international 1% thresholds recommended by Rose & Stroud (1994) (other than for populations in rapid change) was subsequently endorsed by Ramsar Resolution VI.4.
- 2.8 Realistically, prior to internet publishing, it would have been difficult to publish updated estimates and thresholds other than at periodic intervals, but with internet publishing it is more conceivable that new estimates as they become available, could be added to an online database in a rolling-update process. However, there seems to be no reason to revise the original assessment that such a process would be chaotic for decision makers who would have no certainty as to which information to use at any point in time.
- 2.9 Since then, essentially the same recommendations drawn from previous Resolutions have been incorporated into Ramsar’s guidance related to the selection and designation of wetlands of international importance—The *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance of the Convention on Wetlands*, first adopted at COP7 (Resolution VII.11) in 1999, and substantively revised and updated by COP11 in 2012 (Resolution XI.8, Annex 2).

### **3. Whether a Party can use 1% thresholds other than those published within *Waterbird Population Estimates*?**

- 3.1 Turning now to the specific question regarding the use of non-WPE estimates and thresholds. The various Resolutions relating to WPE recognise the need for common international standards. They ‘Call on’ and ‘Urge’ Parties to use WPE thresholds but do not legally require it through use of mandatory language.
- 3.2 In situations where thresholds are unavailable, the *Strategic Framework* states:

“Note that this Criterion [6] should be applied only to those waterbird populations for which a 1% threshold is available. However, for populations of waterbird species in taxa not presently covered by *Waterbird Population Estimates*, this Criterion may be applied if a

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<sup>10</sup> Ramsar Convention. (2002). *Resolution VIII.38: Waterbird population estimates and the identification and designation of Wetlands of International Importance*. 8th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) Valencia, Spain, 18-26 November 2002. [https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/res/key\\_res\\_viii\\_38\\_e.pdf](https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/res/key_res_viii_38_e.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> The issues were outlined by Rose & Stroud (1994).

reliable population estimate and 1% threshold is available from another source and if that information source is clearly specified.”<sup>12</sup>

- 3.3 It seems to STRP that the same logic follows in a situation where an estimate/threshold published in the most recent *Waterbird Population Estimates* clearly does not accurately reflect the population *status quo*, i.e. is not the best available, based on more recent international evaluations.
- 3.4 Another chain of logic flows from the fact that the designation of a Ramsar Site is a process within the national discretion of the Contracting Party.
- 3.5 Thus, we conclude that there is no reason why a Party could not use alternative 1% thresholds where there is good evidence that these more accurately reflect the current biological status of the population concerned.
- 3.6 However, there is long-established consensus as to how this process should work. Based on these principles, if a Party decides to use alternative thresholds, STRP recommends that the following conditions apply:
- that the biogeographical population of the species concerned should be clearly stated cf. the biogeographic populations for the species as listed in WPE;
  - that such thresholds should be derived from estimates that are published, and have been subject to peer-review [note that if that is not the case, then STRP could provide that function on request];
  - that the reasons why a new estimate is considered more appropriate is documented with a clear audit trail to sources – allowing third parties to check the derivation of the estimate. This recognises the potential for legal challenge, and the need to ‘traceability’ for data used to support policy processes;
  - that the standard rounding conventions now established to convert from an estimate size to a 1% threshold should be used; and finally
  - that in this, and any similar situations that arise in the future, is that any variant thresholds used are communicated both to the Secretariat (to maintain a log of such instances), and also to Wetlands International (to include in future WPE updates – should/when they occur).

#### **4. Long-term resolution of the immediate issue**

##### ***What has caused this issue to arise?***

- 4.1 WPE is recognised as the ‘official’ source of Ramsar estimates and derived 1% thresholds, yet, as a process, has no regular or sustainable source of funding. The first edition was produced by

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<sup>12</sup> Ramsar Convention. (2012). Resolution XI.8, Annex 2: *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) – 2012 revision*. 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971), Bucharest, Romania, 6-13 July 2012. <https://www.ramsar.org/document/resolution-xi8-annex-2-rev-cop13-strategic-framework-and-guidelines-for-the-future>.

IWRB, and subsequent editions were produced with *ad hoc* funding support<sup>13</sup>. Whilst COP Resolutions established an ideal timetable of three-yearly WPE updates, Parties have not provided financial support to enable this to be implemented: the most recent WPE being nine years old. A logical and equitable means of providing the small funding needed would be through the inclusion within the Convention's core budget. However, this has never proved politically possible.

- 4.2 A further complication is that regional flyway initiatives are now generating population estimates and 1% thresholds (but for migratory species only—see paragraph 4.3 below) for relevant use. Thus, the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) has a three-yearly update cycle via its *Conservation Status Review* (CSR) process<sup>14</sup> and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) has a similar process. Whilst WPE provides an assessment of all populations of the world's waterbirds (WPE 5 provides information on the distribution, status, trends of 2,304 populations of 871 species), AEWA's CSR covers 553 populations of 254 migratory species. Both WPE and CSR outputs are made available in the WPE searchable on-line database [wpe.wetlands.org](http://wpe.wetlands.org).
- 4.3 However, the sum of regional waterbird population update activity does not equal a global WPE process since: (a) not all regions/ flyways are covered; and (b) even within regions, only populations of migratory waterbirds are considered, whereas Criterion 6 relates to all waterbird species. Thus, flyway initiatives only cover a selection of waterbird species within the areas of their remit.
- 4.4 From CSR7, the AEWA process has been updating relevant 1% thresholds for populations within the AEWA region whose status has changed. This is leading to confusion within the region as to the current definitive source of 1% thresholds, since AEWA Parties have established a new process such that for some populations there are different estimates and 1% thresholds published in WPE5 (2012) and CSR7 (2018).
- 4.5 The situation could be resolved with (regular) funding from Parties (and Multilateral Environmental Agreements) to update WPE and better integrate with the flyway initiatives. However, in the short-term this appears unlikely—despite the huge, and recognised, policy relevance of the publication. In the long-term, sustainable financial support for this process is needed to avoid near continuous *ad hoc* funding-raising by Wetlands International, and an equally *ad hoc* publication schedule, misaligned with reviews by regional flyway initiatives.

## 5. How to resolve these issues?

- 5.1 The issues of lack of regular funding for WPE, resulting in an *ad hoc* rather than regular publication schedule, and the relationship with variant but international processes, derived population estimate/ thresholds produced by flyway initiatives, are becoming increasingly problematic and chaotic, and will become increasingly so.
- 5.2 STRP recommends a process to engage with relevant international stakeholders, in particular the flyway initiatives, to consider the issues and bring to COP14 a recommended, costed process in relation to Criterion 6. The objective would be to put in place sustainable funding to

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<sup>13</sup> *Inter alia* from U.K., Ireland, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Switzerland, Sweden and the Netherlands (including CMS and AEWA as well as from the Ramsar Secretariat.

<sup>14</sup> e.g. [https://www.unep-awea.org/sites/default/files/document/awea\\_mop7\\_14\\_CSR7\\_with\\_annexes\\_en\\_corr1\\_0.pdf](https://www.unep-awea.org/sites/default/files/document/awea_mop7_14_CSR7_with_annexes_en_corr1_0.pdf)

enable predictable, triennial updates of the information necessary for Parties to use this criterion. A possible process is outlined in the Appendix.

- 5.3 In the short-term, however, STRP advises the Standing Committee that Contracting Parties can apply alternative 1% thresholds where there is good evidence that these more accurately reflect the current biological status of the population concerned, although following the conditions outlined in paragraph 3.6.

## **Appendix: A new partnership to support Ramsar's quantitative criteria for wetlands of international importance**

### **Introduction and context**

This document presents a proposal to move both *Waterbird Population Estimates (WPE)* (supporting Ramsar's Criterion 6), to a more stable future, delivering against Ramsar Strategic Plan targets and assisting Parties in implementation of Article 2 of the Convention.

It derives from discussions with relevant actors over the past year, and the report of the STRP Chair to Standing Committee 58 (see SC58 Doc.19).

In summary:

- WPE has been strongly endorsed by Ramsar for over 25 years<sup>15</sup> but has never received any structural support, with the consequence that the global process is now faltering.
- Yet, there is increasing population assessment activity occurring now at flyway scale stimulated by flyway initiatives, but aspects of this is not well integrated with WPE causing confusion for Parties (a risk already foreseen in 1996 – see para 5 of Resolution VI.4 below).
- In contrast, information support for Criterion 9 has never been initiated although this would be relatively simple to do as outlined by STRP to COP9 in 2005.
- There is a need to bring together key organisations on a regular basis to find a long-term solution to these issues as short-term fixes will become increasingly difficult, and existing confusion over 'definitive' information will only get worse.
- The work of such a Partnership would directly contribute to the fulfilment of Targets 6, 8, 14 and 18 of the Ramsar Strategic Plan for 2016-2024.

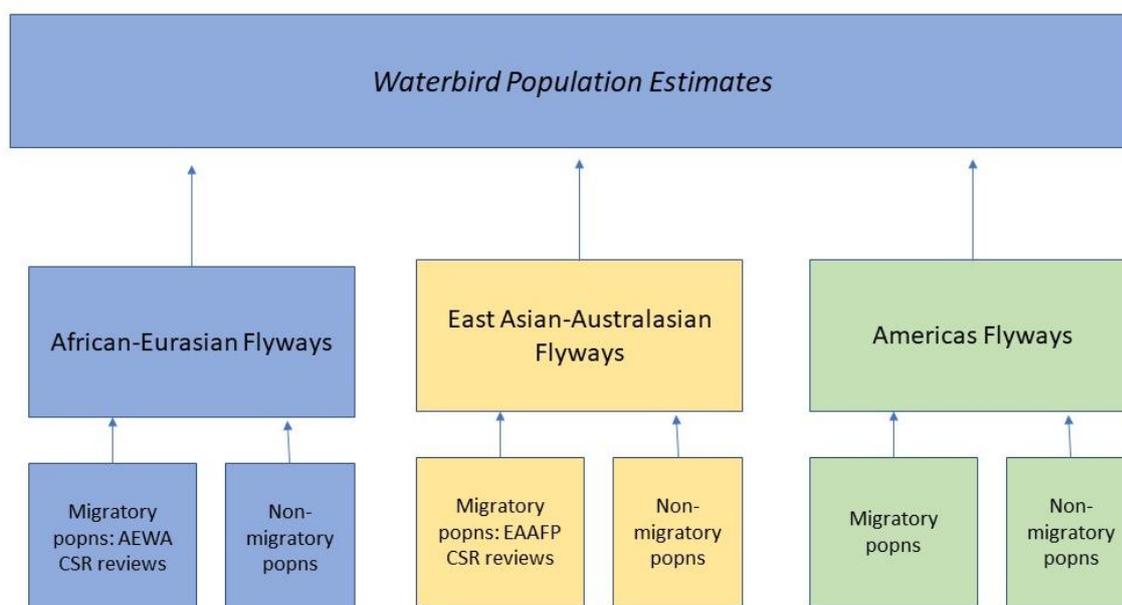
### **Summary concept**

In summary, the proposal would create an international Partnership to deliver a global information product (*Waterbird Population Estimates*) from a range of existing or planned review activity undertaken by international waterbird flyway frameworks (AEWA, EEAFP and others). It would also seek funding for modules that would deliver regular reviews of the status on non-migratory populations excluded within these international agreements, yet nonetheless falling within Ramsar's scope as wetland dependent species to which Criterion 6 applies.

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<sup>15</sup> URGES all Contracting Parties to use ... *Waterbird Population Estimates* as the official and consistent basis for their application of Criterion 6; (Ramsar Res. VIII.38, ¶ 13)

The proposal is outlined schematically below:



(The Partnership would include related activity for the Central Asian and Pacific Flyways not shown here.)

The proposal is of relevance not only to the Ramsar Convention but also to several other international biodiversity agreements as indicated by multiple previous endorsements brought together **Appendix 1**.

**Appendix 2** outlines anticipated modules of work and frequency of review. It is anticipated that funding for the elements of this work would be provided on a shared basis from multiple sources, including from Ramsar Parties, and flyway and other initiatives.

**Appendix 3** summarises existing *ad hoc* activity review activity from 2011 to the present, as well as a proposed timetable of reviews from 2021 to 2030 (making assumptions about anticipated periodicity of international processes - not all of which are formally determined so far ahead).

**Appendix 4** lists some of those international processes that would directly benefit from the outputs of the *Waterbird Population Estimates* process.

### Next steps

Assuming that Ramsar Parties wish to see a long-term resolution of this issue, the following steps would be appropriate:

1. Endorsement from the Standing Committee for the COP to consider the establishment of a partnership to support regular updates of information to implement Criterion 6.
2. Development by potential partners of a modular, costed programme of work to bring into effect a formal Partnership.

## Appendix 1. Recognition of *Waterbird Population Estimates* by the Ramsar Convention and other international frameworks

### Ramsar Resolution VI.4: Adoption of population estimates for operation of specific criteria based on waterfowl (1996)

1. REAFFIRMING the particular ecological values of waterfowl in the identification of internationally important wetlands, as expressed by both the Convention and subsequent resolutions and recommendations of the Conference of the Parties;
2. RECOGNIZING the many Ramsar sites which are of importance to waterfowl, and the continuing need for reliable information to underpin the application of Criterion 3 (c) [now Criterion 6];
3. RECALLING Resolution 5.9 which, *inter alia*, called for the regular updating of international population estimates for waterfowl as the basis of the application of Criterion 3 (c) [now Criterion 6], and which further requested IWRB (now Wetlands International) to bring revised estimates to each future meeting of the Conference of the Parties;
4. AWARE of Technical Workshops coordinated by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee in the UK, the National Environmental Research Institute in Denmark, and Wetlands International to agree timetables for the revision of waterfowl population estimates in the Western Palearctic and East Atlantic Flyway, the conclusions of which were submitted to Technical Session E of the present meeting, and in particular aware of the need to avoid short-term changes in standard 1% thresholds given their value as “bench-marks”, against which sites of possible international importance can be assessed;
5. CONSCIOUS of the need for close technical coordination between the Ramsar Convention and the Bonn Convention’s Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds, and also with other international treaties and agreements, to ensure consistency in the use of international waterfowl population estimates and 1% thresholds; and
6. NOTING Wetlands International’s draft report summarizing revised population estimates and 1% thresholds prepared for the present meeting of the Conference of the Parties in response to Resolution 5.9;

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7. URGES Wetlands International to continue to develop the International Waterfowl Census and to enhance its global coverage as an important basis for the application of Ramsar Criterion 3 (c) [now Criterion 6]; include;
8. ENCOURAGES Wetlands International, using its network of Waterbird Specialist Groups, to work with the Ramsar Bureau, Contracting Parties, and other international treaties in order to review and keep up to date waterfowl population estimates and 1% thresholds, in particular giving priority to the assessment of the sizes of those populations for which no reliable population estimate or 1% threshold currently exists, and to report back the results of such activity to the 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties;
9. AGREES that unless waterfowl populations are poorly known or are known to be rapidly changing, 1% threshold levels should be revised not more frequently than every third ordinary meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties; and

10. CALLS ON Contracting Parties to use these estimates and thresholds, upon their publication, as a basis for designation of sites for the List of Wetlands of International Importance in the succeeding three triennia.

**Ramsar Resolution VIII.38 Waterbird population estimates and the identification and designation of Wetlands of International Importance (2002)**

1. RECOGNIZING that the regular review and updating of estimates of waterbird population sizes is necessary to track the efficacy of measures for the conservation and wise use of waterbird populations, including the establishment of national and international networks of protected sites on migratory waterbird flyways, as called for in the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Resolution VII.11);
2. RECALLING Resolution 5.9, in which the Contracting Parties requested IWRB (now Wetlands International) to provide information on the sizes of waterbird populations as a basis for the application of the Convention's site-selection Criterion 3 include (now Criterion 6), and ALSO RECALLING Resolution VI.4, in which they outlined the desired timetable for such updates and requested Wetlands International to bring updated information to each future meeting of the Conference of the Parties;
3. REAFFIRMING the importance of data collected by Wetlands International through its International Waterbird Census for the assessment of wetlands against Criteria 2, 4, 5 and 6 of the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Resolution VII.11);
4. ...;
5. AWARE of the wide international consultation undertaken by Wetlands International to collate data and information for the third edition of its publication *Waterbird Population Estimates*, prepared for this meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, which brings together the most recent information on the population sizes of waterbirds, as envisaged by Resolution VI.4, and which identifies 1% population thresholds for 1,138 (50%) biogeographic populations of waterbirds, but also AWARE that, despite this, there remain 1,133 populations of waterbirds for which there is no reliable population estimate from which to establish a 1% threshold for the application of Ramsar Criterion 6;
6. ...;
7. ...;
8. RECOGNIZING the role of the international Specialist Groups of the Species Survival Commission of IUCN – The World Conservation Union as well as those of Wetlands International in collecting, analysing and interpreting waterbird population data;
9. ...;
10. ...;

11. DESIRING to promote the application of a consistent global source of information on 1% thresholds for the application of Criterion 6 for designation of Wetlands of International Importance;

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12. WELCOMES the publication of the third edition of *Waterbird Population Estimates* prepared for this meeting of the Conference of the Parties, and CONGRATULATES Wetlands International on the work undertaken to further develop this global and consistent source of data and information of importance for wetland and waterbird conservation and wise use, and for increasing the number of biogeographic populations for which population estimates and 1% thresholds are now available;
13. URGES all Contracting Parties to use appropriate 1% thresholds contained in the third edition of *Waterbird Population Estimates* as the official and consistent basis for their application of Criterion 6 of the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* for the designation of Ramsar sites during the 2003-2005 triennium;
14. ALSO URGES Contracting Parties to work together to identify and designate coherent flyway-scale networks of Ramsar sites for migratory waterbirds, in line with Action 12.2.2 of the Convention's Strategic Plan 2003-2008, including working cooperatively with the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) through the Joint Work Plan between the Ramsar Convention, CMS and AEWA;
15. FURTHER URGES Contracting Parties to select Ramsar sites for globally threatened waterbirds in implementation of Action 12.2.1 of the Convention's Strategic Plan 2003- 2008, noting also the value of selecting Ramsar sites to support conservation strategies for nationally or regionally threatened waterbirds;
16. REQUESTS Wetlands International, with the assistance of the Ramsar Bureau, to make widely available, including in electronic formats, the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of *Waterbird Population Estimates* to all Contracting Parties, non-Parties and other organizations involved in the identification and designation of Ramsar sites;
17. REQUESTS Wetlands International to continue to bring an updated edition of *Waterbird Population Estimates* to each future Conference of the Parties, having first undertaken international scientific consultation on its contents, so that the population estimates and 1% thresholds it contains may be used as the basis for the application of Criterion 6 in the succeeding triennium;
18. WELCOMES the intention of Wetlands International to enhance the scope and coverage of future editions of *Waterbird Population Estimates* so as to include all waterbird taxa listed in the glossary to the Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance;
19. ALSO WELCOMES the proposed establishment by Wetlands International of a Global Waterbird Monitoring Steering Committee as a means of focusing the future development of the International Waterbird Census, and in particular its contribution to the strategic development of the Ramsar List, and REQUESTS this Committee, once established, to identify ways and

means of increasing the availability of data and information from the IWC to Contracting Parties and others in support of their identification and designation of Ramsar sites;

20. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties and others with relevant data and information to assist Wetlands International and BirdLife International through the continued collection and supply of population data on waterbirds, including globally threatened species and those species identified by BirdLife International in *Threatened Birds of the World* as being data deficient;
21. ENCOURAGES the Species Survival Commission of IUCN and Wetlands International to facilitate the establishment of further Specialist Groups for waterbird taxa where no such expert networks currently exist, so as to assist in the collation and critical interpretation of waterbird population data of value for the application of Criterion 6;
22. ...;
23. ...; and
24. URGES Contracting Parties to apply waterbird monitoring data, and analyses drawn from them, when appropriate, as a means of providing objective information for site management planning and the evaluation of national or regional wetland policies.

#### **Ramsar Res X.22. Promoting international cooperation for the conservation of waterbird flyways**

25. REQUESTS Wetlands International to draw upon status information from *Waterbird Population Estimates* to report periodically on the state of the world's waterbirds to the Contracting Parties of Ramsar, CMS, AEWA and CBD, and URGES Contracting Parties and others both to contribute to the necessary financial support to enable the production of such international assessments; and to support the coordinated International Waterbird Census (IWC), which contributes to these population estimates and assessments and the provision of much other relevant knowledge.

#### **Ramsar Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance**

206. **Waterbird population size.** To ensure international comparability, Contracting Parties should use the international population estimates and 1% thresholds published and updated approximately every three years by Wetlands International as the basis for evaluating sites for the List using this Criterion. Most recent 1% thresholds are given in *Waterbird Population Estimates*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (2006), which also provides a description of the biogeographic range of each population. Earlier editions of *Waterbird Population Estimates* are now superseded and should not be used for Criterion 6 application.

#### **Convention on Migratory Species Resolution 12.11: Flyways**

19. Recommends that Parties enhance and strengthen monitoring of migratory bird populations and the important sites they rely upon (including surveying new sites to fill information gaps), and to increase capacity for and sustainability of such monitoring in the long term, where appropriate by institutionalizing it as an ongoing activity within government, in partnership with other organizations, including through provision of support initiatives such as the Global Waterbird Fund (established in response to the invitation of AEWA and the Ramsar Convention and managed by Wetlands International) in order to present to key stakeholders with up-to-

date information on the distribution, status and trends of migratory birds and the sites and habitats that they need;

**African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement Resolution 3.6: Developing an international partnership for support of waterbird population assessments**

1. *Urges* the urgent development of an international partnership to provide an essential and long term funding regime for the International Waterbird Census and *Waterbird Population Estimates*, involving relevant users of outputs, *inter alia* international conventions and treaties, regional economic integration organisations, international agencies, national governments, and national and international non-governmental organisations as appropriate;
2. *Requests* the Agreement Secretariat to work with Wetlands International to develop costed proposals to this end and to co-ordinate with interested parties to establish such a partnership as a matter of priority, thus facilitating the timely delivery of the Report on the status and trends of waterbird populations for future MOPs;
3. *Requests* the support of the Ramsar Convention, the Convention on Migratory Species, the Convention on Biological Diversity, regional economic integration organisations, national governments, the European Community, national and international non-governmental organisations, and donor organisations to establish such arrangements for the financial support of the International Waterbird Census and *Waterbird Population Estimates* and its derived outputs as a means of informing a wide range of national and international conservation policies and indicators.

**East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership Decision 10.12: Development of a Conservation Status Review of Migratory Waterbird Populations for the EAAF**

1. *Adopts* a systematic process to maintain up-to-date information on waterbird population estimates, trends and 1% thresholds through the preparation of a periodic EAAF Conservation Status Review;
2. *Calls* on the Partners and the Secretariat to support periodic production of the EAAF Conservation Status Review (at least every alternate MoP or not more than four yearly) as appropriate within national circumstances.
3. *Mandates* Wetlands International to coordinate preparation of the EAAF Conservation Status Review in consultation with the Technical Sub-Committee, Science Unit of the Secretariat, Partners, Working Groups, Task Forces and other experts, with a target for a first edition to be produced by end 2019 (with a draft structure provided in Annex III);
4. *Calls* on Secretariat in liaison with Wetlands International to ensure that the output of the periodic EAAF Conservation Status Reviews feed into the global WPE updates.
5. *Calls* on the Monitoring Task Force to develop standardised guidance required for development and implementation of comprehensive national waterbird monitoring programmes.

## Appendix 2. Anticipated work of the Partnership

### Waterbirds

Module	Frequency
Global publication of <i>Waterbird Population Estimates</i>	Triennial update
Global collation of <i>Waterbird Population Estimates</i> from regional processes for migratory species	Triennial
Global assessment of non-migratory waterbirds for inclusion in <i>Waterbird Population Estimates</i>	Staggered triennial update for each global region <sup>16</sup>
Regional assessment process for Africa-Eurasia (AEWA)	Triennial
Regional assessment process for Central Asian Flyway <sup>17</sup> (no operational flyways framework yet; CMS CAF Action Plan Framework under development, with recent energies injected through the CMS COP by India)	Triennial
Regional assessment process for East Asian – Australasian Flyway (EAAFP) <sup>18</sup>	Triennial
Regional assessment process for Central Pacific flyway (no existing framework)	Six to nine years <sup>19</sup>
Regional assessment process for Americas <sup>20</sup> (no operational Americas flyways framework yet; CMS Americas Flyways Framework under development)	Triennial
Co-ordination of the Global Co-ordination Committee	Annual

<sup>16</sup> Global update on a nine-year, three COP cycle, with a three-year focus on non-migratory waterbirds within one of the three main regions (Africa-Eurasia, Asia-Pacific, Americas) thus spreading costs.

<sup>17</sup> The CMS Central Asian Waterbirds Flyway Action Plan 2005 refers to the need to improve measurement of trends and share information with international organisations to enable review.

<sup>18</sup> EAAFP Decision 10.12 states: “Calls on the Partners and the Secretariat to support periodic production of the EAAF Conservation Status Review (at least every alternate MoP or not more than four yearly) as appropriate within national circumstances.”

<sup>19</sup> Linked to the non-migratory waterbird review for the Asia-Pacific or Americas.

<sup>20</sup> CMS Resolution 12.11, Annex 3, Action Plan for the Americas Flyway 2018-2023 refers to the need to promote a review before 2023.

**Appendix 3: Review/ update cycle of the *Waterbird Population Estimates (WPE)* linked to Ramsar requirements and flyway frameworks/initiatives**

**BIE = Birds in Europe; CSR = Conservation Status Review**

Conservation Initiative	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Ramsar Convention		WPE 5									WPE 6			WPE 7			WPE 8			WPE 9
AEWA CSR	CSR 5			CSR 6			CSR 7			CSR 8			CSR 9			CSR 10			CSR 11	
EU Birds Directive				BIE 3										BIE 4						
East Asian – Australasian Flyway CSR										CSR 1				CSR 2?						
Other Flyway Updates																				

#### **Appendix 4. Relevance of Partnership to international biodiversity conservation processes**

##### **Support development of global conservation conventions**

- Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
- Convention on Migratory Species
- Convention on Biological Diversity
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

##### **Support development of flyway/ regional agreements and treaties**

- Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA)
- Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention)
- East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP)
- European Union's Birds Directive
- Western/ Central Asian Site Network for Siberian Cranes and other Waterbirds (WCASN)
- Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN)

##### **Other global/international processes**

- National reporting on Aichi targets (and Post-2020 biodiversity targets, as relevant)
- UNEP Global Environment Outlook (GEO)
- IUCN Red list of Threatened Species
- BirdLife International species fact sheets and assessments

## Annex 2

### List of future scientific and technical priorities

Ramsar Strategic Plan Goal	Topic	Thematic work area <sup>21</sup>	STRP 2019-21 work plan	Source	Notes	Priority
<b>Goal 1: Addressing the drivers of wetland loss and degradation</b>	Literature review of the effectiveness of wetland mitigation	TWA 3	No	<a href="#">SC57 Doc.8</a>		High
	Tools to conserve, enhance wetlands and their services in decisions of investments in energy and mining, infrastructure, manufacturing and processing sectors in/around wetlands.	TWA 3	No	<a href="#">STRP</a>		Medium
	Agriculture and wetlands: maintaining and restoring the ecological character of wetlands in agricultural settings	TWA 2	No	<a href="#">STRP</a>		High
	Climate change and wetlands– updated information on the projected impacts of climate change on the world’s wetlands	TWA 5	No	<a href="#">STRP</a>		High
<b>Goal 2: Effectively conserving and managing the Ramsar Site network</b>	Global assessment of gaps in Ramsar site network	TWA 1	Yes	<a href="#">XII.5, Annex 1, ¶¶ 1-2</a>	Medium priority in current work plan (Task 1.7)	High
	Protected areas and wetlands– promoting conservation and wise use	TWA 1	No	<a href="#">STRP</a>		High
	Review of effectiveness of Ramsar Convention in conserving migratory waterbirds	TWA 1	No	<a href="#">STRP</a>		High

<sup>21</sup> Please note that only the thematic work areas will be submitted to COP14, in line with Resolution XII.5, Annex 1, ¶ 46.

Ramsar Strategic Plan Goal	Topic	Thematic work area <sup>21</sup>	STRP 2019-21 work plan	Source	Notes	Priority
<b>Goal 3: Wisely using all wetlands</b>	<p>Blue carbon (BC):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review and analysis regional modelling of carbon stocks, greenhouse gas emissions and carbon dynamics in coastal blue-carbon ecosystems and providing information, as appropriate, to the IPCC to inform future updates to the Wetlands Supplement;</li> <li>- Guidance for prioritizing conservation and restoration of BC ecosystems, including climate change mitigation and adaptation benefits; the range of other potential ecosystem benefits and services; and assessment of costs relative to benefits;</li> <li>- Reviewing and updating (as appropriate) existing guidance on preparation of plans for conservation, restoration and sustainable management of BC ecosystems at Ramsar Sites where such a review could include development of case studies with regional experts to illustrate how guidance has been applied;</li> </ul>	TWA 5 GWO	Yes	<a href="#">Res. XIII.14, ¶ 15(b)-(d)</a>	Task rolling forward to next triennium. Part of this task (desktop review) completed this triennium.	High
	Develop guidance on the conservation, wise use and management of sustainable “working coastal habitats” in coordination with the scientific subsidiary bodies of other MEAs under the proposed coastal forum	TWA 3	Yes	<a href="#">XIII.20, ¶ 45</a>	Lower priority in current work plan (task 3.2)	Low  Medium
	Updated urban wetland guidance as required	TWA 2	Yes	<a href="#">XIII. 16, ¶18</a>  <a href="#">STRP</a>	Medium priority in current work plan (Task 2.7)	Medium
<b>Goal 4: Enhancing implementation</b>	Prepare guidance on inventories and monitoring of small wetlands, and their multiple values for biodiversity conservation, especially in the contexts of landscape management and climate change	TWA 1	Yes	<a href="#">XIII.21, ¶ 23</a>	Medium priority in current work plan (Task 1.3)	Medium

Ramsar Strategic Plan Goal	Topic	Thematic work area <sup>21</sup>	STRP 2019-21 work plan	Source	Notes	Priority
	Reviewing and revising the Rapid Cultural Inventories for Wetlands guidance	TWA 2	Yes	<a href="#">XIII.15, ¶19</a>	Medium priority in current work plan (Task 2.6)	Medium
	Peatland restoration: - Developing templates for national reporting on peatland restoration  - Assess national peatland restoration experiences  - Assess implementation status of Res. VIII.17: Guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands	TWA 2	Yes	XIII.13, ¶34	Lower priority in current work plan (tasks 2.4 (a) and (b), 2.3)	High
	Policy and legal frameworks are not resulting in effective wetland conservation and use		No	<a href="#">SC57 Doc.8</a>		High
<b>Cross-cutting</b> (Goals 1-4)	Global Wetland Outlook 2024 (or later) – initiate planning and identify content	GWO	No	STRP		High
	Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework and SDGs		No	<a href="#">Res. XIII.5</a>		High