

Urgent challenges to the wise use of wetlands to receive enhanced attention: update in the development of wetland inventories and other challenges

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. note the progress of Contracting Parties in completing national wetland inventories and the lessons learned;
- ii. note progress in the support provided by the Secretariat to Contracting Parties on the completion of national wetland inventories;
- iii. instruct the Secretariat to continue working with Contracting Parties on the completion of national wetland inventories and wetland extent, to report on SDG Indicator 6.6.1 (Resolution XIII.7); and
- iv. provide feedback to the Secretariat on the recommendations concerning wetlands restoration.

Background

1. As noted in Resolution XIII.7 *Enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions*, the Convention on Wetlands is co-custodian with UNEP of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Indicator 6.6.1. The Convention contributes to monitoring progress with data from National Reports on extent of wetlands, based on the Convention's definitions and requirements for reporting.
2. Paragraph 40 of Resolution XIII.7 "requests the Secretariat to continue working with Contracting Parties on the completion of national wetland inventories and wetland extent to report on SDG Indicator 6.6.1".
3. The Standing Committee at its 54th and 57th meetings, through Decisions SC54-26 and SC57-47, approved the allocation of funds to support Contracting Parties in the completion of wetland inventories.
4. The Standing Committee at its 57th meeting (SC57), in Decision SC57-53, decided to prioritize the topic of inventories for the current triennium in order to allow Contracting Parties to focus on measures to address this urgent challenge, potentially leading to a draft resolution or resolutions for consideration at the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP14).

5. The Standing Committee (through Decision SC57-54) decided to allocate time on the agenda of SC58 for discussion of current best practices in the development of wetland inventories and to create an opportunity for engagement between Parties, representatives of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel, the CEPA Oversight Panel, International Organization Partners, the Secretariat and others, on tools and approaches to address the challenges faced by many Parties in developing, improving, finalizing and maintaining wetland inventories.
6. The Secretariat prepared document SC58-9¹ *Urgent challenges to the wise use of wetlands to receive enhanced attention: Best practices in the development of wetland inventories* with the progress of Contracting Parties in completing national wetland inventories (NWIs) and the lessons learned; however, this document was not addressed at the intersessional process of SC58 in 2020.
7. The present report presents the progress of Contracting Parties in completing NWIs and the support provided by the Secretariat. The document also proposes next steps to continue supporting Contracting Parties for consideration by the Standing Committee. The report also calls the attention of the Standing Committee to the importance of wetlands restoration as an important challenge under the UN Decade on Restoration.

Progress of Contracting Parties in completing national wetland inventories and support from the Secretariat to Contracting Parties

8. The NWI is a fundamental tool for developing and implementing effective policies and actions for the mission of the Convention: the conservation and wise use of all wetlands as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development. Without an NWI, it is difficult for Contracting Parties to ensure the effective management of their wetlands.
9. The Secretariat has a mandated role as co-custodian of SDG Indicator 6.6.1 to track global wetland status and trends, which helps to measure progress toward SDG 6. In line with Resolution XIII.7 on *Enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions* and Decision SC57-47 on wetland inventories, the Secretariat continues working with Contracting Parties to complete information on wetland extent.
10. In the above context, the Secretariat provided guidance and training to Parties for the submission of National Reports to COP14 to enable them to provide data using the three main categories in the Ramsar classification (inland, marine and coastal, and human-made wetlands) that could be used also for SDG reporting. The Secretariat is working with Parties to complete and refine the information on extent that has been submitted to the Secretariat and to identify information that is available in existing inventories referred in National Reports, that has not been used to report on wetland extent. Through this mechanism, national validated data using accepted international definitions of wetlands was provided in March 2020 and February 2021 to the UN Statistics Division to measure the extent of water-related ecosystems under SDG 6 (Indicator 6.6.1). This information feeds into the global SDG database hosted by the UN Statistics Division.

¹ https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/sc58-9_inventories_e.pdf

11. Although data on the extent, distribution and trends of wetland types are still incomplete, Contracting Parties started reporting national data in 2018, followed by reports in 2021, thus providing nationally validated data to SDG 6.6.1 that will be updated every three years. 150 Parties provided data in their National Reports in 2018 showing the following preliminary data and change between reports in 2018 and 2021: global wetland extent of inland wetlands (natural surface and human-made wetlands) drawing on information from 150 National Reports to the Convention to Indicator 6.6.1 in the period 2015-2018 cover over 4.2 million km² and in the period 2018-2021, cover 6.3 million km²). Around 88.8 % are inland wetlands (natural surface) and 11.12 % human-made wetlands. The largest areas of inland wetlands (natural surface and human-made wetlands) are according to the SDG regional grouping in the developing regions, 63% (of the global area), inland wetlands (natural surface) in the Americas 51%, and human-made wetlands in Eastern Asia and South-eastern Asia 9%.
12. Accuracy of global wetland area data is increasing in the period 2018-2021 as Contracting Parties to the Convention are scaling up efforts to complete or update wetlands inventories. Further reporting in 2021 and 2024 will soon provide a more clear trend on the extent and distribution of wetland types.
13. As reported to SC58, the Secretariat developed and launched a toolkit for use by Contracting Parties that includes best practices and addresses the identified gaps in knowledge through the provision of guidance, support and resources including Earth observation tools to complete wetland inventories and report on wetland extent <https://www.ramsar.org/news/a-new-toolkit-for-national-wetlands-inventories>. The Secretariat also undertook in November training sessions for Contracting Parties on wetlands inventories and reporting on wetland extent to support the preparation of their National Reports to COP14.
14. Following the delivery of online training, further support may be offered, including on-site demonstrations, subject to the available funding and capacity of the Secretariat to deliver such events.
15. Under the UN initiative to undertake voluntary actions to accelerate implementation against the SDGs, the Secretariat registered the Convention on Wetlands Acceleration Action “Wetland inventories to support Contracting Parties to achieve Indicator 6.6.1” under SDG 6 “Water and Sanitation” on the Acceleration Actions page of the SDGs Knowledge Platform². The supporting activities mentioned above including the new toolkit for National Wetlands Inventories and the training sessions for Contracting Parties were registered as part of the Acceleration Action.
16. With the data provided by Contracting Parties in their National Reports to COP14 on SDG 6 Indicator 6.6.1, the Secretariat prepared a joint storyline with UNEP for the UN Secretary General Report for the High Level Political Forum in July 2021.
17. As reported in document SC58 Doc.9, based on the gap analysis that identifies challenges facing Contracting Parties seeking to meet their commitments under the Convention to undertake, refine or complete wetland inventories and report on wetland extent, and priorities (including funding) to overcome the challenges, the Secretariat with consultant support prepared a draft fundraising proposal that aims to secure resources to enable Parties to improve the availability and quality of NWIs. The Secretariat continues to seek donor support for this proposal. The

² <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgaactions>

proposal can be viewed here: <https://www.ramsar.org/document/draft-project-proposal-investing-in-national-wetland-inventories-a-key-building-block-to>

Next steps

18. In document SC58 Doc.9 the Secretariat recommended some steps to continue supporting Contracting Parties in developing, improving, finalizing, and maintaining wetland inventories, given the decision of the Standing Committee to prioritize the topic of inventories for the current triennium.
19. In order to continue supporting Contracting Parties to develop or update wetland inventories the Secretariat recommends the following next steps:
 - a. Wetland inventories: The Secretariat will continue to analyse current challenges faced by Contracting Parties that described an NWI as “in progress” in the National Reports submitted to COP14, in order to tailor the support which they may require to finalize them and in preparation for reporting to COP15. In addition, the Secretariat will continue working with Contracting Parties that have completed an NWI to complete and refine the information submitted on wetland extent and to identify information that is available in existing inventories in order to report to SDG Indicator 6.6.1.
 - b. Capacity building: The Secretariat will continue the preparation of training courses on wetland inventories (including online training) focused on priority topics and on-site demonstrations, subject to the available funding and capacity of the Secretariat to deliver such events.
 - c. Fundraising: The Secretariat will continue looking for donor support to implement the fundraising proposal to strengthen the capacities of Parties to undertake, complete or update national wetland inventories.
 - d. Guidance on wetland inventories: The current Convention guidance for wetland inventories would benefit from being updated to include relevant new information on the use of tools and technology such as Earth observation. The Secretariat continues preparing a proposal on how to move this forward and will update the Standing Committee accordingly.

Other challenges: Wetlands restoration

20. UN Member States decided to implement a Decade on Ecosystem Restoration to ensure that healthy ecosystems play a critical role towards achieving the SDGs by 2030. The Secretariat participated actively in 2020 in the development of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and in the task force of the aquatic and transitional ecosystems’ monitoring and evaluation framework. These engagements informed the consideration of Goal 6 indicator 6.6.1 “change on the extent of water-related ecosystems over time” of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for which the Convention is co-custodian and various targets of the Convention’s 4th Strategic Plan as priority indicators of the UN Decade’s Monitoring Framework. In February 2021, the Secretariat was appointed as Global Partner of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.
21. The UN Decade on Restoration, that debuted on 5 June 2021, aims at joint efforts to collaborate and successfully implement restoration initiatives across the world that include: promoting a

global movement focussing on restoration; developing legislative and policy frameworks to incentivise restoration; developing innovative financing mechanisms to fund operations on the ground; undertaking social and natural science research on restoration in terrestrial, freshwater, estuarine as well as marine environments; monitoring global progress on restoration; and building the technical capacity of restoration practitioners globally.

22. Wetlands are vital for our survival; however the world has lost 87% of its wetlands since 1700 — and they continue to disappear at an alarming rate, even today. The Convention on Wetlands recognizes that the restoration of the Earth’s wetlands must be a key priority for ensuring a sustainable future. It is thus a priority in Target 12 of the Convention’s Strategic Plan. The United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030 represents a distinct and timely opportunity for joining efforts and making meaningful headway worldwide in preventing, halting, and reversing the degradation of our planet’s wetlands.

23. On the occasion of the launching of the UN Decade on Restoration, as a global partner of the UN Decade on Restoration, the Secretariat produced three fact sheets to assist restoration efforts by Focal Points, policy makers and practitioners. The three fact sheets are:

Wetlands restoration: unlocking the untapped potential of the Earth’s most valuable ecosystem
https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/factsheet_wetland_restoration_general_062021_e_0.pdf

Realizing the full potential of marine and coastal wetlands: why their restoration matters
https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/factsheet_wetland_restoration_coastal_062021_e.pdf

and Restoring drained peatlands: now an environmental imperative
https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/factsheet_wetland_restoration_peatlands_062021_e.pdf

24. These materials highlight the critical role wetlands play in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.
25. Given the relevance of the Convention to the UN Decade on Restoration, is important that Contracting Parties apply the principles and guidelines for wetland restoration contained in Resolution VIII.16 in their national wetlands policies and plans and in undertaking national wetlands inventories applying the Convention toolkit for wetlands inventory to identify priority sites for restoration relevant for biodiversity conservation, disaster risk reduction, livelihoods, and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Contracting Parties will report their progress on these matters in their triennial National Reports to COP15 as contribution to the Convention Strategic Plan and the UN Decade on Restoration.
26. The Secretariat will also continue reporting on the Global Implementation of the Convention to the COP on the progress on wetlands restoration based on the National Reports submitted to COP15 and will provide training opportunities to strength Contracting Parties capacities in wetlands restoration subject to the availability of resources.
27. Reference to the UN Decade on Restoration and the actions above have been included in the draft Resolution to enhancing the Convention’s visibility and synergies with other multilateral

environmental agreements and other international institutions for the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties.