

## Report and Decisions of the 59th Meeting of the Standing Committee

**Tuesday 22 June 2021**

**13:00 – 16:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee**

### Agenda item 1: Opening statements

1. Opening statements were made by:
  - H.E. Eng. Mohamed Al Afkham, Chair of the Standing Committee;
  - Mr Stewart Maginnis, Global Director of the Nature-based Solutions Group, IUCN;
  - Mr Chris Rostron, International Engagement Manager, WWT, on behalf of the six International Organization Partners (IOPs); and
  - Ms Martha Rojas Urrego, Secretary General of the Convention.

### Agenda item 2: Adoption of the provisional agenda

2. The Secretariat introduced the provisional agenda in document SC59 Doc.2 Rev.1, noting that consensus on items for consideration had been previously reached by the Standing Committee on most matters with the exception of: Review of the Rules of Procedure; Review of all previous Resolutions and decisions; and Draft resolutions submitted by Contracting Parties. With respect to draft resolutions submitted by Contracting Parties, it was noted that the matter could either be addressed at the current meeting or at a future face-to-face meeting. One Party had proposed to reopen Post-SC58 Intersessional Decision 10 (regarding document SC58 Doc.20.4.Rev.5) by which the Standing Committee had previously approved the process for the preparation and review of draft resolutions.
3. Participants supported limiting the scope of the agenda to time-sensitive matters, given the limited time available, to those matters on which consensus had been reached, and excluding other items.
4. Interventions were made by China, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Finland, Japan, Mexico, Sweden and Uruguay.

**Decision SC59-01: The Standing Committee adopted the provisional agenda in document SC59 Doc.2 Rev.1, excluding those items contained in square brackets.**

### Agenda item 3: Adoption of the provisional working programme

5. The Secretariat introduced the provisional working programme in document SC59 Doc.3, noting that with the adoption of the provisional agenda, items scheduled for discussion on Thursday 24 June would no longer be addressed.

6. In discussion proposals were made to allocate the time freed up to the Subgroup on Finance to allow it to complete its work. It was agreed that some flexibility should be retained in the working programme to allow other matters to be addressed, should the need arise.
7. Interventions were made by Australia, Japan, Mexico, Republic of Korea, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America.

**Decision SC59-02: The Standing Committee adopted the provisional working programme in document SC59 Doc.3, amended to make provisional allowance for a further meeting of the Subgroup on Finance on Thursday 24 June, if required.**

Agenda item 4: Admission of observers
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8. The Secretariat outlined the key paragraphs of document SC59 Doc.4 *Admission of observers*.

**Decision SC59-03: The Standing Committee admitted the observers listed in document SC59 Doc.4.**

9. The Chair gave the floor to the Legal Advisor to present an overview of the legal opinion requested by the Strategic Plan Working Group concerning the authority of the Standing Committee in the establishment of Working Groups. She reported that she had been unable to find a specific impediment to the Committee establishing a new working group to prepare the fifth Strategic Plan, although the current SPWG must still satisfy the requirements of Resolution XIII.5 with regards to the revision of the fourth Strategic Plan and related tasks.

Agenda item 7: Report of the Management Working Group
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10. The Secretariat introduced document SC59 Doc.7 *Report of the meeting of the Management Working Group of 14 June 2021*.
11. The Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel noted that the Panel intended to produce a draft resolution addressing CEPA governance and another presenting a new approach to CEPA.
12. The Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel emphasized that the STRP had focused on and largely completed its four highest priority tasks (production of a revised Global Wetlands Outlook; wetlands and sustainable agriculture; peatland restoration; and wetlands and blue carbon), noting that some work was still needed to complete the revised edition of the GWO. Attention was now turning to addressing ad-hoc advisory tasks.
13. Regarding data to support Ramsar Criterion 6 on waterbird populations, Wetlands International noted that most such estimates were now out of date, having last been revised in 2012. However Wetlands International was shortly to launch a new portal, supported by the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi, which is intended to help fill existing gaps.

**Decision SC59-04: The Standing Committee requested the Secretariat to finalize the Global Wetlands Outlook in close consultation with the STRP, for launch in 2021 in association with the commemoration of the Convention's 50th Anniversary.**

**Decision SC59-05: The Standing Committee instructed the STRP to complete the ad-hoc task on Criterion 6, in line with the guidance provided by the Management Working Group, taking a**

narrow interpretation of the request made and focusing closely on the need of Contracting Parties for concrete, practical information on available data and guidance on its application.

**Decision SC59-06:** The Standing Committee encouraged the STRP to continue its work on blue carbon, in line with the current work plan, and to consider additional tasks within the current work plan that were not identified as high-priority tasks as well as any relevant emerging issues, to develop its work plan for the coming year.

**Decision SC59-07:** The Standing Committee requested the STRP to undertake discussion and analysis with a view to further developing STRP priorities for the coming triennium.

Agenda item 5: Report of the Executive Team and Chair of the Standing Committee
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14. The Chair of the Standing Committee introduced document SC59 Doc.5 *Report of the Executive Team and Chair of the Standing Committee*.
15. A Contracting Party observer suggested that the annual assessment of the Secretary General might be included in the terms of reference of the Executive Team published as Annex 8 to the *Report and Decisions of the 57th Meeting of the Standing Committee*<sup>1</sup>, and that the impacts and consequences of holding virtual or “hybrid” Standing Committee meetings might be assessed. The Party also underlined the importance of Parties supporting the STRP and the CEPA Oversight Panel in their work under the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 situation.
16. The Chair of the Standing Committee explained that he had carried out his role of assessing the Secretary General in cooperation with the relevant IUCN staff and in accordance with IUCN procedures. The Secretariat reported that it would be providing a report on attendance at the 59th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC59) and would be surveying participants’ levels of satisfaction with the meeting as in previous meetings of the Standing Committee. The Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel reported that the pandemic had not had financial implications for the Panel.

**Decision SC59-08:** The Standing Committee noted the Report of the Executive Team and Chair of the Standing Committee published as document SC59 Doc.5, and the preceding report published as document SC58 Doc.5.

Agenda item 20.1: Report of the Subgroup on COP14
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17. The Chair of the Subgroup on COP14 introduced the Subgroup’s report published as document SC59 Doc. 20.1, noting that the Subgroup had unanimously agreed to postpone the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP14) until 2022, and that the host country, China, was proposing 21 to 29 November 2022 as suitable dates. The host country proposed a venue for 1,000 participants. The Subgroup had decided that the selection of Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award winners was not time-sensitive and recommended that it be deferred until the next Standing Committee meeting in 2022. The Subgroup also noted that final approval of the dates of COP14 as well as approval of the Secretariat budget for 2022 would require the holding of an extraordinary meeting of the COP.
18. Standing Committee members expressed concern regarding the proposed limit to the number of attendees and sought clarification on how this would be put into practice. Members of the

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/sc57\\_report\\_decisions\\_s.pdf](https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/sc57_report_decisions_s.pdf)

Committee weighed the importance of ensuring maximum attendance and full participation of Contracting Party delegations against that of optimizing the participation of IOPs and other civil society partners. The environmental benefits of reducing participant travel by including virtual elements within the event were also weighed against the value of face-to-face discussions where possible, given the difficulties of remote participation due to time zones and other factors. The possibility of streaming the event for the benefit of remote audiences was noted.

19. One Standing Committee member suggested to include the selection of the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award winners at the current meeting, should time allow. The Chair of the Standing Committee requested that the Chair of the Subgroup on COP14 consult with the Subgroup members and report back to the Standing Committee in order to inform a decision.
20. The Secretariat reminded the Standing Committee of the process contained in the Rules of Procedure for convening an extraordinary meeting of the COP, noting that it had to receive a request from at least one Contracting Party. Once such a request was received one third of Parties (57) must support the request within six months. From the date that this requirement is met, the meeting must be convened within 90 days. The Secretariat would share the dates, venue, provisional agenda and documentation within one month of the same date (Rules 4 and 5).
21. The Secretariat identified two possible periods for such a meeting: from 4 to 8 October and from 25 to 29 October 2021. It did not expect the meeting to take up the entirety of such a period.
22. Interventions were made by Brazil, China, Dominican Republic, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, and WWT.

**Decision SC59-09: The Standing Committee took note of the Report of the Subgroup on COP14 published as document SC59 Doc.20.1.**

**Decision SC59-10: The Standing Committee approved 21 to 29 November 2022 as the proposed dates for COP14 and agreed to submit the new dates for COP14 to the extraordinary meeting of the COP to be held in 2021.**

**Decision SC59-11: The Standing Committee requested the host country and the Secretariat, in consultation with the Subgroup on COP14, to review options on the possible size of the meeting to take account of the comments of the Standing Committee members.**

Agenda item 18: Work plan of the Secretariat for 2021
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23. The Secretary General introduced document SC59 Doc.18, *Integrated Secretariat 2021 Annual Plan as part of the approved Triennial Plan for 2019-2021*, and referred to document SC59 Doc.6 *Report of the Secretary General* in reviewing the activities since the last meeting of the Standing Committee. These documents emphasized the ways that the Secretariat had responded to the impacts of the pandemic, drawing attention in particular to the greatly increased use of internet-based solutions in its work in implementing the plan. For example, eight thematic and operational webinars had attracted over 930 participants from over 130 countries, and the virtual event to celebrate World Wetlands Day had over 9,000 viewers. These approaches could be applied after the pandemic for efficient outreach. The

considerable uncertainty created by the pandemic, along with intersessional decision-making processes of the Standing Committee and other bodies, had necessitated constant reprioritization which had stretched the resources of the Secretariat team. The pandemic had also created significant challenges, in particular through the impact of home working on members of the Secretariat. As a result actions were being implemented to ensure the continued wellbeing of staff.

24. The efforts of the Secretariat in continuing to implement its work plan were widely praised, with several participants commending the increased use of internet technologies and encouraging its further development. The Secretary General confirmed that webinars had been recorded and published to enable continuing access, and that they may be repeated. There was also general agreement that the wellbeing of Secretariat staff was of paramount importance. Some expressed frustration that it had been difficult to keep abreast of important decisions, for example in discussions regarding the timing of COP14.
25. In response the Secretary General noted that intersessional decision-making was an iterative process and that as soon as decisions had been taken, the information was conveyed in diplomatic notes sent out to all Contracting Parties. In addition, pages had been created in the website with notifications and intersessional decisions. She stressed the important role of regional representatives to the Standing Committee in getting input from and providing feedback, including informal, to Contracting Parties in their regions, and that the Secretariat supported this work when requested. It was suggested that consideration could be given to the online posting of the minutes of Executive Team meetings.
26. Standing Committee members and observers provided differing views on the roles of the Permanent Missions in Geneva in supporting implementation of the Convention in their countries. The Secretary General observed the interactions including briefings for Missions in Geneva and participation of Mission staff in Standing Committee meetings, and highlighted the value of Missions in certain interactions with Parties, for example to support the organization of the COP. She noted that it had not been possible to deliver the most recently planned briefing due to COVID-19 restrictions.
27. One Standing Committee member noted that the plan could usefully bring together activities including interaction with the Global Environment Facility (GEF).
28. Interventions were made by Finland, Japan, Mexico, Slovenia, Sweden, United Kingdom, the United States of America and Uruguay.

**Decision SC59-12: The Standing Committee took note of and approved the Integrated Secretariat Annual Plan 2021 as part of the approved Triennial Plan for 2019-2021.**

**Wednesday 23 June 2021**

**13:00 – 16:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee**

Follow up from previous day:  
Mandate of working groups and decision on SC59 / SC60

29. The Legal Advisor provided further clarification regarding working groups. She reported that there were effectively two kinds of working groups: those established by the Standing

Committee and those established by the COP. At its discretion, the Standing Committee could adjust the mandates and timelines of its own working groups but, under the existing Rules of Procedure, could not change those established by the COP (Rule 25.3.a.). She further noted that, as long as the procedures in the Rules of Procedure and in Resolution XIII.4 on *Responsibilities, roles and composition of the Standing Committee and regional categorization of Countries under the Convention* were followed, with Contracting Parties being notified at least three months in advance, there was nothing to prevent the Standing Committee from dividing a meeting into two parts, as it saw fit. This would, for example, allow the Effectiveness Working Group to complete its work without contravening Resolution XIII.3 on *Governance of the Convention*.

30. Support was expressed for adopting a pragmatic, flexible approach in response to the current extraordinary circumstances which would enable working groups to complete their tasks for COP14, although the view was also expressed that dividing the present meeting into two or more parts might set a confusing precedent.
31. Interventions were made by Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America.

**Decision SC59-13: The Standing Committee decided that its present meeting (SC59) would be divided into two parts, the second part to be held in 2022 at a proper time before the date established for COP14.**

Follow up from previous day: Participation in virtual meetings
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32. The Secretariat reported on participation at the most recent Standing Committee meetings as follows:
  - SC57: 96 Contracting Party representatives from 48 Parties; 18 observers.
  - SC58: 66 Contracting Party representatives from 34 Parties; closed session, no observers invited.
  - SC59: 97 Contracting Party representatives from 39 Parties; 16 observers; 153 registered participants in total.

Follow up from previous day: Report from the Chair of the Subgroup on COP14 on the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards
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33. The Chair of the Subgroup on COP14 noted that a consultation by email had been carried out the previous evening and had received a unanimous response, namely that the Subgroup members had not had enough time to consider candidates put forward as possible recipients of the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards, and that the issue, not being time-sensitive, should be deferred until a later session of the Standing Committee. The Chair requested that the Secretariat inform those who nominated candidates for Awards of the new timeline.

**Decision SC59-14: The Standing Committee decided to defer consideration of the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards to its next session, to be held in 2022.**

Agenda item 17.3: World Wetlands Day themes for 2022-2024
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34. The Secretariat informed the Standing Committee that, despite the COVID-19 related restrictions, 1,100 World Wetlands Day events in 82 countries had been reported in 2021. It

introduced document SC59 Doc 17.3 *World Wetlands Day themes for 2022-2024*, proposing as themes: “using wetlands wisely” (2022); “wetland restoration” (2023); and “wetlands and gender” (2024). Other suggestions proposed for consideration were “wetlands and human wellbeing” and “nourishing our planet – wetlands and food”.

35. The themes for each year and the additional suggestions received widespread support. Linking the 2022 theme with that proposed for COP14 (“wetlands action for people and nature”) was proposed, while the launch of the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration was also noted and that the forthcoming revision of the Global Wetland Outlook already had wetland restoration as a major theme. A number of observations were made along with suggestions for possible refinements and future themes, including: “wetlands and carbon”; “wetlands and sustainable food”; “wetlands and indigenous communities”; “wetlands and watershed management”; “wetlands and regional development”; “wetlands for everybody” (incorporating gender and other issues of inclusion); “citizen power – supporting wetland conservation”; and “youth exploring a new horizon of wetland conservation”.
36. Following discussion, the Secretariat presented a revised proposal for the World Wetlands Days of 2022-2024 taking into account the comments from Standing Committee participants as follows:  
2022: Wetlands action for people and nature (linked to the theme for COP14)  
2023: Wetland restoration (linked to the UN decade for ecosystem restoration)  
2024: Wetlands and human wellbeing.
37. An update was provided by Costa Rica on the implementation of Resolution XIII.1 on *World Wetlands Day* concerning progress made in the submission of a draft resolution to the United Nations General Assembly inviting it to recognize 2 February of each year as International World Wetlands Day observed by the United Nations. The group of interested Contracting Parties urged all Parties to contact their Permanent Missions in New York to invite them to participate in a side event to be held at on 7 July at the margins of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, and to support the submission of the resolution to the General Assembly. The Secretariat stated that it would provide more information to all Contracting Parties once the event is included in the Forum’s agenda.
38. Interventions were made by Argentina, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Japan, Oman, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America.

**Decision SC59-15: The Standing Committee decided that the themes for forthcoming World Wetlands Days would be:**

**2022: Wetlands action for people and nature**

**2023: Wetland restoration**

**2024: Wetlands and human wellbeing**

Agenda item 10: Report of the Working Group on the Review of the Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention

39. The Chair of the Working Group introduced its report contained in document SC59 Doc.10, explaining that Australia had taken up the role following the sad death in September 2020 of the previous Chair, Mr Paul Mafabi of Uganda. A summary of the history of the group, key tasks and processes was presented in two slides, which are included as Annex 1 to the present report. The Chair of the Working Group noted that the current Fourth Strategic Plan would

only run until 2024 and that the Group was proposing minimal refinement of the Plan, drawing attention instead to a series of five proposed thematic annexes that the Contracting Parties could, if they wished, add to the Plan at COP14. He further proposed the establishment of a new working group to begin development of the next (Fifth) Strategic Plan to ensure consistency and continuity. He further noted that, of the budget allocated for the preparation of the review of the Fourth Plan, CHF18,000 remained unspent and proposed that this be reallocated for development of the Fifth Plan. Advice from the Secretariat's Legal Advisor indicated that there was no impediment to the establishment of such a working group, should the Standing Committee decide that this was appropriate.

40. During discussion, many participants expressed condolences to Mr Mafabi's family, noting his long association with and achievements for the Convention. One Standing Committee member expressed a desire for a simpler, action-oriented Fifth Strategic Plan. Others raised concerns as to whether it was appropriate for the Standing Committee to establish a working group on the Fifth Strategic Plan without input from COP14, and that the Standing Committee does not have the mandate to amend the current Strategic Plan, but that work done could be circulated for the Contracting Parties to use in an informal way until COP14 may decide to amend the present Plan. Some comments were made concerning the scope of the thematic annexes.
41. The Chair of the Working Group further clarified that some of the annexes in the document, such as Annex C on the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), reflected delays in other processes caused by the pandemic, and were intended to serve as place holders.
42. Interventions were made by Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, Mexico, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States of America.

**Decision SC59-16: The Standing Committee took note of the work of the Strategic Plan Working Group; invited it to recommend to COP14 to add to the Fourth Strategic Plan thematic annexes that address emerging and other issues, noting that the existing Annex 2 will be updated to map the Ramsar Targets with the post-2020 Biodiversity Goals and Indicators when available.**

**Decision SC59-17: The Standing Committee agreed that existing guidance and tools be communicated to Contracting Parties to support the implementation of the Fourth Strategic Plan in the gap year to COP14, subject to available capacity within the Secretariat.**

**Decision SC59-18: The Standing Committee noted that the Working Group will prepare a draft resolution about the review of the Fourth Strategic Plan, proposed thematic annexes, and areas where new guidance could be progressed in the next triennium, and basic elements for the preparation of a proposed framework for the Fifth Strategic Plan, indicating the key elements, for the Standing Committee meeting in 2022 ahead of COP14.**

**Decision SC59-19: The Standing Committee recommended that the Contracting Parties at COP14 extend the term of the Fourth Strategic Plan from 2024 until such time as COP15 may be held, in order to ensure continuity between successive Plans.**



Thursday 24 June 2021

13:40 – 16:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 10: Report of the Working Group on the Review of the Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention (continued)

43. The Chair of the Standing Committee summarized discussions from the previous day, noting that the Chair of the Working Group on the Review of the (Fourth) Strategic Plan had proposed that a new working group be established by the Standing Committee to start work on the Fifth Strategic Plan to come into effect in 2024.
44. In further discussion, concerns were raised on the relatively limited time available for any new working group to start its work and on the possibility that COP14 might adopt a different approach to the Fifth Strategic Plan, resulting in the formation of another working group to address the matter. It was generally agreed that having multiple or overlapping working groups addressing the strategic plan would not be necessary or desirable. In all cases, existing Working Group members should be encouraged to continue their work in any new group, to ensure as much consistency and continuity as possible, although it was also noted that the Standing Committee had no mandate to force Contracting Parties to join working groups.
45. A Standing Committee member noted that, as the CEPA Oversight Panel had not completed its work on a new approach to CEPA, it might be difficult for this to be incorporated into work on the Fifth Strategic Plan. In response, the Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel noted that the CEPA Oversight Panel had effectively finished its work but had not yet prepared the related draft resolution. However the agreed text on the new approach to CEPA could be incorporated into a draft of the Fifth Strategic Plan.
46. The Chair of the existing Working Group proposed the text of a decision to the Standing Committee. This was agreed with a minor amendment to change a reference to “integrate” to “accommodate”.
47. Interventions were made by Australia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Slovenia, Sweden and the United States of America.

**Decision SC59-20: The Standing Committee established a new working group with membership from Contracting Parties, the STRP and International Organization Partners, to commence preparation of the Fifth Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention, with the terms of reference and work plan to be agreed intersessionally, and be designed to accommodate the key elements and any additional priority elements and modalities for the Fifth Strategic Plan that may be agreed at COP14. The Standing Committee encouraged the participation of members of the Working Group on the Review of the Fourth Strategic Plan in the new working group, for continuity purposes.**

Agenda item 21.1: Report of the Ramsar Regional Initiatives Working Group

48. The Chair of the Working Group (Costa Rica) introduced the Group’s report contained in document SC59 Doc.21.1, and summarized its work to date, specifically in addressing Resolution XIII.9 on *Ramsar Regional Initiatives 2019-2021*. She noted that the work had proved relatively complex and challenging, and thanked the Secretariat for its support. A consultant, appointed through a tendering process, had been engaged to produce new

operational guidelines, which had been the subject of an iterative review process. Agreement had been reached on most elements of the guidelines but some remained unresolved and were shown in square brackets in the current draft, which is included as Annex I to the draft resolution in the document. A small working group, comprising four Contracting Parties (Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama and Uruguay) was established to prepare the draft resolution for consideration at the next session of the Standing Committee. The working group had completed its mandate, working in difficult circumstances, and had demonstrated how initial disagreements could be overcome through constructive dialogue.

49. Participants congratulated the Working Group on its efforts, though one Party noted that the current draft resolution contained some inaccuracies and inconsistencies. They trusted that work would continue to further refine the draft resolution with proposed improvements to be suggested by Contracting Parties when the draft prepared by the Working Group is considered at the resumed session of the Standing Committee.
50. One Standing Committee member expressed concern regarding the proposals for two new Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) not being part of the agenda of the current meeting, and noted that in paragraph 21 of document SC59 Doc.21.2, only one of these proposals (in the Southern African Development Community region) had been recommended to the Standing Committee for endorsement. In response it was noted that this agenda item was not selected by the Standing Committee as a time-sensitive matter, that any budget allocation for new RRIs would be addressed by the Subgroup on Finance, and that endorsement of any new RRIs would be addressed at the resumed session of the Standing Committee.
51. Interventions were made by Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America.

**Decision SC59-21: The Standing Committee took note of the progress report on the work of the Ramsar Regional Initiatives Working Group, and agreed that the draft resolution would be considered at the resumed session of the Standing Committee.**

Agenda item 11: Report of the Chair of the Effectiveness Working Group
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52. The Chair of the Effectiveness Working Group (the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) introduced the Group's report contained in document SC59 Doc.11, noting that, because of the pandemic, the Group had been unable to finish its work. Three reports relating to the governance of the Convention had been produced by a consultant and were included as annexes to the document. The final report contained recommendations made by the consultant on possible measures to enhance the effectiveness of the Convention. The Working Group was currently assessing these and, based on its deliberations, intended to submit a draft resolution to the next session of the Standing Committee for its consideration.
53. In the discussion it was noted that, as the consultant's reports were long, some time would be needed for Contracting Parties to digest their contents. The Working Group was encouraged to continue its work and explore all options in making recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the Convention.
54. Interventions were made by China, Sweden and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

**Decision SC59-22: The Standing Committee took note of the report of the Effectiveness Working Group contained in document SC59 Doc.11.**

Agenda item 14: Report of the Working Group on Observer Status in the United Nations General Assembly

55. The Chair of the Working Group (Mexico) introduced the Group's report contained in document SC59 Doc.14, noting that it summarized the findings of a legal consultancy undertaken to explore options for enhancing participation in UN high-level fora and processes under the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The Working Group was in the process of analysing the financial implications of the different options outlined in the consultant's report and intended to report back with final recommendations at the resumed session of the Standing Committee.
56. During discussion a Contracting Party observer noted that informal consultations with members of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) had indicated that progress in obtaining observer status at that Council would be difficult as there was a request for Observer Status in the UNGA.
57. One Contracting Party observer noted that a number of important events will take place in the coming year, including COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, COP26 of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the IUCN World Conservation Congress (IUCN WCC, to be held in Marseille, France, in September 2021). It is essential that wetland issues are fully integrated within these negotiations, and that to achieve this the Secretariat and Contracting Parties to the Convention mobilize to work together to define possible inputs to enhance the visibility of the Convention and promote the importance of wetland conservation through stakeholder dialogue. It was noted that the Secretary General will be a speaker at an opening plenary event on fresh water at the IUCN WCC.. The Contracting Party observer urged other Contracting Parties along with the Secretariat to ensure that the Convention's goals are fully represented in the development of the post-2020 biodiversity framework. The observer asked that a copy of its full intervention be included as an annex to the present report (see Annex 2).
58. The Secretary General recalled the active engagement of the Secretariat in relevant policy processes including the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. She further referred to the joint work of representatives of Contracting Parties and the Secretariat in the Bern workshops aimed at facilitating engagement of biodiversity-related conventions in this process. She noted the availability of further information in document SC59 Doc.16 on *Enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions*. Beyond the work of the Secretariat, Contracting Parties were strongly encouraged to seize every opportunity to raise wetland issues in all relevant fora, and to ensure that their importance was not overlooked when text was being negotiated in relevant fora.
59. Interventions were made by France, Mexico, Slovenia and Switzerland.

**Decision SC59-23: The Standing Committee took note of the report of the Observer Status Working Group contained in document SC59 Doc.14, and recommended that the Working Group continue its work and report back at the Committee's resumed session.**

**Friday 25 June 2021**

**13:00 – 16:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee**

Agenda item 8: Financial and budgetary matters: Report of the Subgroup on Finance
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60. The Chair of the Subgroup on Finance (Mexico) introduced parts I and II of the report of the meeting of the Subgroup, contained in documents SC59 Com.1 and SC59 Com.2 and annexed to the present report as Annexes 3 and 4 respectively. He thanked the Secretariat for its hard work and rapid responsiveness over the past ten months and also the other members of the Subgroup for their willingness to work constructively and flexibly under often difficult circumstances.
61. Further clarification was sought regarding the appearance of the term “other benefits” in the proposed budget for 2022, in Annex 2 to document SC59 Com.2. The Secretary General explained that these were various benefits, such as home leave and subsidies for travel on public transport, that formed part of IUCN’s standard staff benefits. For presentation purposes the Secretariat had proposed including these in a single budget line, but the Subgroup on Finance had preferred that they be combined with salaries and social costs in a single budget line for each of the different operational units within the Secretariat. The Chair of the Subgroup further clarified that this change to the method of presentation had no financial implications.
62. In response to a question regarding the budget allocated to COP14 and in particular the funding needed to allow full participation of Contracting Parties at the COP, it was explained that the Convention’s core budget did not make provision for funding of the COP. Regarding delegates’ travel, Resolution XIII.2 *Financial and budgetary matters* had included as a priority for the Secretariat’s fundraising efforts COP14 sponsorship for eligible delegates.
63. It was suggested that to improve the value of reporting by Ramsar Regional Initiatives, the Standing Committee might consider adopting a template for financial reporting by RRI which had been included as Annex 2 in document SC58 Doc.22.2 *Report of the Secretariat on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives*. The Secretariat explained that the Standing Committee had not prioritized this agenda item for consideration at either SC58 or the present meeting. This item could be considered by the Standing Committee at the resumed session of the meeting.
64. Interventions were made by China, Dominican Republic, Japan, Finland, Mexico and Uruguay.

**Decision SC59-24: The Standing Committee adopted Part I and Part II of the Report of the Subgroup on Finance without amendment.**

**Decision SC59-25: The Standing Committee noted with concern the challenges caused by the timing of the arrival of the audited financial statements, which results in the late delivery of finance-related documents and prevents compliance with Rule 10 of the Rules of Procedure, and requested the Secretary General to take the measures necessary to ensure that all non-audit-related financial documents, especially those that are related to requests for additional funds, are circulated in accordance with Rule 10 ahead of the meetings of the Subgroup of Finance in order to facilitate adequate and appropriate consideration of all budgetary matters.**

**Decision SC59-26: The Standing Committee:**

- **accepted the 2020 audited financial statements as of 31 December 2020;**

- noted the core budget results for 2020;
- noted the non-core balances and voluntary contributions for 2020; and
- noted the unspent/uncommitted balances that are carried forward from 2020 to 2021, as described in paragraph 20 of document SC59 Doc.8.1.

**Decision SC59-27: The Standing Committee:**

- approved and noted the proposed adjustments to the COP13-approved core budget (see Annex 1 of Annex 4 of the present report); and
- approved the presentation of the “other benefits” within the merged budget line “salaries, social costs and other benefits” for each budget area in the future budgets, recognizing that this change in location of the funding between budget lines does not reflect a change to funding levels.

**Decision SC59-28: The Standing Committee approved the allocation of CHF 72,000 from savings from the 2020 core budget to accommodate the increase of provisions for outstanding contributions in the 2021 budget.**

**Decision SC59-29: The Standing Committee approved the following uses of 2020 core budget savings:**

**For 2021:**

- CHF 25,000 for the development and production of World Wetlands Day 2022 resources;
- CHF 86,000 for improvements to the Convention’s website.

**For 2022:**

- CHF 76,000 to cover the core budget gap for core activities of the Secretariat for 2022 (subject to approval of the 2022 budget by the extraordinary COP).

**Decision SC59-30: The Standing Committee:**

- took note of the status of annual contributions;
- noted the actions listed in paragraphs 14 and 15 of document SC59 Doc.8.2 on group confirmation of outstanding contributions as part of the audit process;
- noted the actions listed in paragraphs 17, 19, 20 and 21 to continue encouraging the payment of annual contributions;
- noted the change in annual contributions receivable and in the annual provision against contributions receivable; and
- noted the status of the African voluntary contributions.

**Decision SC59-31: The Standing Committee:**

- took note of the contents of document SC59 Doc.8.3;
- approved the one-year budget for 2022 (see Annex 2 of Annex 4 of the present report) for submission to the extraordinary COP based on budget Scenario A at 0% increase presented by the Secretariat; and
- requested the Secretariat to prepare a draft resolution on the budget for approval by the extraordinary COP.

**Decision SC59-32: The Standing Committee approved the allocation of CHF 90,000 from savings from the 2020 core budget for the work of the Working Group on the Review of the Strategic Plan, in accordance with Decision SC59-20 by the Standing Committee to establish a new working group.**

**Decision SC59-33: The Standing Committee approved the allocation of CHF 25,000 to each of the four eligible Ramsar Regional Initiatives for their activities in 2021 from the core budget line D**

**“Support to Regional Initiatives”, provided that receiving RRI conform to sub-paragraph 8.d. of Resolution XIII.9.**

**Decision SC59-34: The Standing Committee decided that any request for core funds by Ramsar Regional Initiatives should include a rationale about how they support Contracting Parties in implementing the Convention and its Resolutions and guidance, and that requests must be provided in English or with an English translation (with informal “google translate” translations, screened by the country’s National Focal Point, acceptable), to enable the Subgroup of Finance to make informed decisions in a timely manner.**

**Decision SC59-35: The Standing Committee approved, pending confirmation that the funds would be spent in alignment with paragraph 8 of Resolution XIII.9, the remaining budgeted allocation of CHF 10,000 from the original proposal in 2020 of CHF 25,000 to two of the four eligible Ramsar Regional Initiatives in the context of Decision SC58-28, for their activities planned in 2020 but delayed to 2021 and for disbursement in 2021, from the 2020 core budget savings, taking into account the current exceptional circumstances of the global pandemic. The two RRI are the Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Senegal River Basin (SenegalWet) and the Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Amazon River Basin, and the allocations are made provided that receiving RRI conform to sub-paragraph 8.d. of Resolution XIII.9 and other relevant rules and regulations related to reporting on use of core funds.**

Agenda item 27: Dates and venues of the 60th and 61st meetings of the Standing Committee
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65. The Secretariat noted that the Standing Committee had decided (through Decision SC59-13) that the present meeting would take place in two parts, with the second part to be held in 2022. Taking into account other meetings, it had identified two possible periods for this: 23-27 May and 20-24 June 2022.
66. General support was expressed for the earlier of the two periods, although it was noted that the earlier dates clashed with a meeting of the Global Environment Facility. It was agreed that, given the large anticipated agenda for the next Standing Committee session, it would be desirable to retain the possibility of having two extra days (28 and 29 May 2022) for the meeting if they are identified as necessary once the provisional agenda has been finalized.
67. Several views were expressed, focusing on the status of existing draft resolutions and whether it would be desirable or possible under the Rules of Procedure for Contracting Parties to submit new draft resolutions given that, under Rule 5.1, draft resolutions should have been submitted 60 days before the opening of the current Standing Committee meeting if they are to be considered by COP14. It was noted that some existing draft resolutions contain time-sensitive components that would need to be revised in light of the postponement of COP14, and that some Working Groups had not yet completed their work, including preparation of draft resolutions mandated by the COP. It was further noted that many Contracting Parties did not bring forward new resolutions because of the uncertainty about the COP and its likely postponement.
68. Clarification was sought of Post-SC58 Intersessional Decision 11 concerning SC59 and the communication to Contracting Parties of a possible new timeline for the submission of draft resolutions for consideration by COP14. The Secretariat clarified that consideration of such a timeline was the subject of the ongoing discussion at SC59.

69. Standing Committee members and Contracting Party observers expressed differing views on whether the process for submission of new draft resolutions by Parties might be reopened. To allow Parties to do so if they so wished a Standing Committee member suggested that the next Standing Committee session be divided in two (SC59 part 2 and SC60); however some Parties believed that this would set an undesired and potentially confusing precedent. A Contracting Party observer mentioned that this has already been done in other fora, for example the UN Forum on Forests, without any problems. Another Contracting Party observer stressed the need to follow the rules of the Convention and expressed concern about having new resolutions as this would increase the workload during COP14. It was also noted that the Standing Committee, having already decided through Decision SC59-13 that it would resume SC59 in 2022, would need to reopen this Decision in accordance with Rule 37 if it wished to modify this.
70. In further discussion the Standing Committee decided that those Contracting Parties that had submitted draft resolutions in accordance with the deadline for the present meeting would be able to submit revisions of these no later than 60 days before the resumed SC59 in 2022. Those Working Groups that had not yet submitted draft resolutions in accordance with their mandates could also do so by this deadline. At the suggestion of a Standing Committee member, the Secretariat would seek advice from its Legal Advisor on whether Contracting Parties could submit new draft resolutions within this timeframe and on whether it was possible for the Standing Committee to hold the second part of its 59th meeting and its 60th meeting back-to-back so that Contracting Parties could submit new draft resolutions by 24 March 2022 for consideration by COP14. The Secretariat would transmit this advice to Contracting Parties for further consideration.
71. Interventions were made by Australia, France, Japan, Republic of Korea, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America.

**Decision SC59-36: The Standing Committee decided that the resumed session of its 59th meeting would take place between 23 May and 27 May 2022, with the possibility of extending the session for another two days if required once the provisional agenda had been finalized. Those Contracting Parties that had submitted draft resolutions for the present meeting could submit revised versions by 24 March 2022. Working Groups whose mandate included submission of draft resolutions for consideration by COP14 could also submit draft resolutions by 24 March 2022.**

**Decision SC59-37: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to seek legal advice on whether, under the current Rules of Procedure, Contracting Parties could submit new draft resolutions by 24 March 2022 for consideration by COP14 in the context of the decision to have a resumed session of SC59 in 2022, and whether it was possible for the Standing Committee to hold the second part of its 59th meeting and its 60th meeting back-to-back.**

Agenda item 28: Adoption of the report of the meeting
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72. The Secretariat noted that revised versions of the reports of the first two days of the meeting, taking into account comments received, were available on the website.
73. The Chair of the Standing Committee asked Committee members to submit comments on the report of the third day, which had been published, and that of the fourth day which they would receive by e-mail.

74. Interventions were made by Dominican Republic, France and Sweden.

**Decision SC59-38: The Standing Committee adopted the reports of the first and second days of the meeting, and instructed the Secretariat to share the report of the fourth day with the Committee, and revise the reports of the third and fourth days in accordance with the comments received.**

Agenda item 29: Any other business
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75. One Standing Committee member repeated its concern which it had raised in the previous session regarding Ramsar Regional Initiatives, questioning why the endorsement of one would now be delayed to 2022 and why the other had been assessed by the Secretariat as not meeting the criteria for endorsement. In response it was noted that this agenda item was not selected by the Standing Committee as a time-sensitive matter for consideration at the present session as described in paragraph 50 above.
76. Argentina stated that on 18 June 2021 its Permanent Mission in Geneva had presented a note to the Secretariat regarding the most recent update of the Ramsar List and asking that this be recorded.
77. An observer representing the European Union presented an oral statement on the Second Consultation Workshop of Biodiversity-related Conventions on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (Bern II), convened remotely between 18 January and 2 February 2021. The observer, as the co-chair of this process, acknowledged the active contribution of the Convention' Secretariat and Parties to the meeting, and highlighted the benefits of collaboration between multilateral environmental agreements for the implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, and for reporting. The observer shared a web address for the full meeting report and background documents.<sup>2</sup>
78. Closed sessions were held on 23 and 24 June, and the Standing Committee agreed to hold a further closed session in September 2021, possibly in the week of 13-17 September.
79. Interventions were made by Argentina, the European Union, Sweden, Switzerland and Youth Engaged in Wetlands.

Agenda item 30: Closing remarks
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80. The Chair of the Standing Committee suspended the meeting.

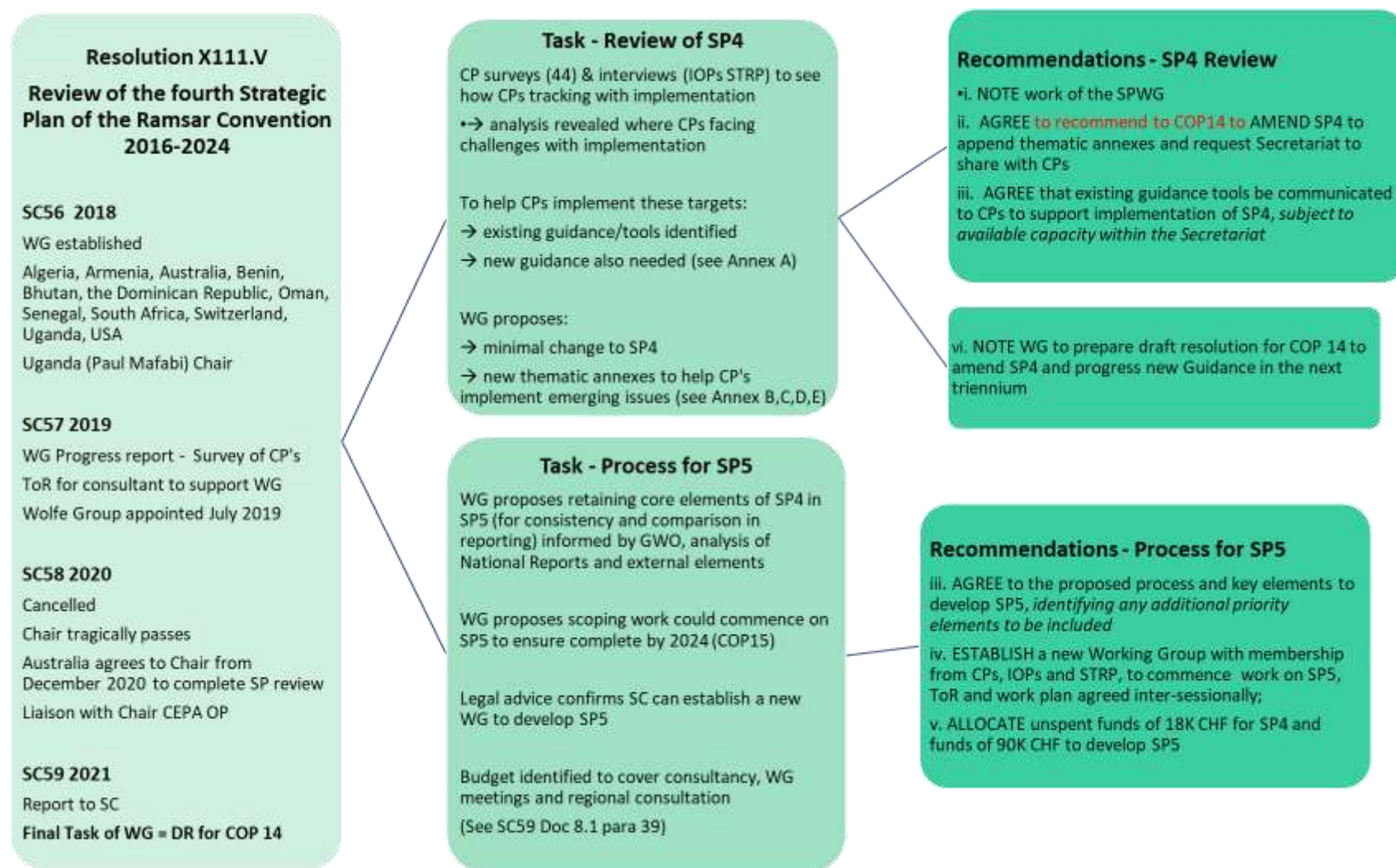
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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.unep.org/events/workshop/bern-ii-consultation-workshop-biodiversity-related-conventions-post-2020-global>



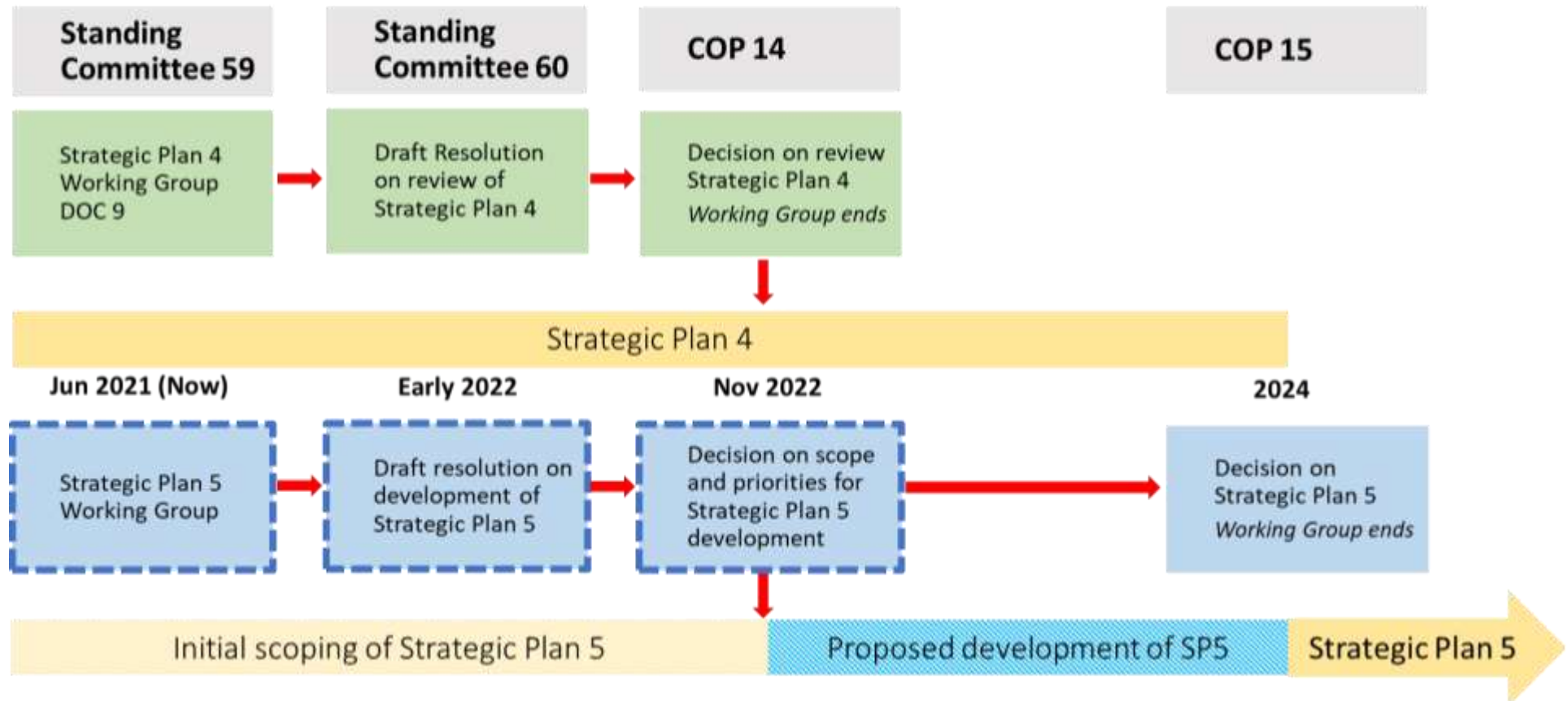
## Annex 1

### Presentation of the Chair of the Working Group on the Review of the Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention



# Standing Committee 59 Doc 10

## Ramsar Strategic Plan Processes



## **Annex 2**

### **Statement by France (non-member) during the discussion of item 14**

Good morning, good evening, as this is the first time I have taken the floor, I would like to greet you all and say how pleased I am to see you again, even if it is virtually.

I will not comment on the report that has been presented, but I would like to talk more broadly about the international deadlines on the environment.

In the 2021-2022 period, several key international conferences on the environment and climate will be held, in particular the IUCN World Congress, COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and COP26 of the UNFCCC.

It will also be an opportunity to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Ramsar Convention, the oldest Multilateral Environmental Agreement, signed in 1971.

Considering the crucial importance of wetlands conservation in all these meetings, it is essential to have a common political ambition between the Contracting Parties and the Secretariat on this subject, and at the highest level, and that the Ramsar Convention amplifies its efforts and visibility in the preparation of and during these decisive meetings for the international community.

In September, France will host the World Conservation Congress in Marseille. This event will be a key meeting point for the international community, States, NGOs, research organizations, and representatives of local communities and of the private sector, as well as an essential point of passage in the preparation of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties on biological diversity. Several actions to promote wetland conservation are already planned and we encourage the delegations that will be present, as well as the Secretariat, to participate and raise awareness of them, and to take the opportunity to show their commitment to wetlands.

For example, IUCN has planned a high-level event on freshwater and wetlands during the opening plenary on 4 September, entitled "Our Freshwater Global Risk - Taking Actions to Reverse the Trend". We are particularly pleased to see that you will be participating, Secretary General, as well as Ms Elizabeth MREMA, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

France is also planning an event in the French Pavilion on the following day, 5 September, which will focus specifically on wetland issues, and we hope that you will also be able to take part in this event, Madam Secretary General, alongside our Minister, Mr Jérôme Bignon. We will be in touch with you very soon on this subject.

We are also organising a "Wetlands Village" throughout the Congress, in order to raise awareness of the subject among as many visitors as possible, to give it the greatest possible visibility and to mobilize as much interest as possible. The Secretariat of the Convention, all stakeholders and International Organization Partners will be our permanent guests on this occasion. It is important that the Standing Committee supports the IUCN World Conservation Congress, which is a major multi-stakeholder event, by inviting the parties to the Ramsar Convention and the Secretary General to promote the importance of wetlands, which are currently under threat, for biodiversity and the climate.

We know that the 15th COP of the CBD will be a decisive step for the years to come. Many of us have been engaged for several months, despite the health crisis, in negotiating the post-2020 framework that will set our common ambition for biodiversity. And it is the same ambition, which is

essential in view of the degradation of the environment and the impact of climate change on ecosystems, that must prevail at the meeting of the stakeholders of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Glasgow. Otherwise, the objectives of the Paris Agreement cannot be achieved.

France is particularly committed, up to the highest level of government, to the ongoing negotiations on climate and environmental issues, with a view to raising our ambitions as necessary in light of the challenges we must face together. We also organised a very high-level One Planet Summit in January, have been preparing the World Conservation Congress for several years, chair the Alliance for the Conservation of Rainforests (of 30 member states) and co-chair the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People (of 65 member states). We will also hold the Presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2022. In all these forums, we want to actively “carry” the subject of wetlands.

Because it is essential that wetlands are taken into account in the post-2020 global strategic framework for biodiversity, the Secretariat, with the support of the dedicated Working Groups, should analyse the degree to which wetlands have been taken into account in V1 of the future post-2020 framework, which will be transmitted on 12 July to the CBD's Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) 3, and should make proposals aimed at better taking wetlands into account.

Also, beyond the questions of organization, governance, budget, dates for the postponement of the next Ramsar COP, etc., all of which were addressed this week by the Standing Committee, we consider that it is our common responsibility as the Secretariat of the Convention and the Parties gathered here to take advantage of the holding of this Committee in order to consider concrete actions and proposals for each of the meetings we have just mentioned, in order to ensure that wetlands, their conservation, preservation and future are taken into account, and as a nature-based solution.

The coming year is a huge opportunity. It is our duty to seize it.

## Annex 3

### Report of the virtual meeting of the Subgroup on Finance, Part I

21 June 2021 13:00 – 16:30, published as in-session document SC59 Com.1

#### Participants:

##### ***Members of the Subgroup on Finance***

Australia, Costa Rica, Estonia, Japan, Mexico (Chair), Panama, Senegal (also representing RRI SenegalWet), Switzerland and the United States of America.

##### ***Contracting Party Observers***

Cambodia, Colombia (also representing the Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Amazon River Basin), Islamic Republic of Iran, Sweden, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

##### ***Representatives of Ramsar Regional Initiatives (present for agenda item 2)***

The Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative (IBRRI), represented by IUCN and the Ramsar Regional Initiative for Central Asia (RRI-CA), represented by Uzbekistan and CAREC.

##### ***Secretariat***

Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General, Finance Manager, Director, Science and Policy, Senior Advisor for the Americas, documentation, administrative and IT staff.

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The Chair opened the meeting and introduced the agenda, noting that item 2 on allocation of the core budget line D “Support to Regional Initiatives” would be covered at the end of the meeting, when representatives of Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIIs) had joined. The Chair also thanked Japan for sending the questions and comments ahead of the meeting, that were addressed by the Secretariat and shared with the Subgroup with the updated agenda before the meeting. The participants approved the agenda.

The Subgroup agreed to produce the Subgroup report in two parts, taking into account that some issues were to be considered by the Standing Committee before the final decision on allocations

The group reminded the Secretariat of the importance of publishing of documents in accordance with Rules 10 and 13 of the Rules of Procedure. The Secretary General noted this, while recalling the need to await the report of the auditors and observing that the demands of virtual working and intersessional decision-making had added to the challenge this year. The Secretary General further noted that some documents that had already been published by the Secretariat had become inaccessible on the website due to technical issues. This had been corrected. The Chair recognized the issue while noting for the record the remarkable efforts of the Secretariat in this period.

#### *Recommendation for decision by the Standing Committee:*

***The Subgroup on Finance recommends that the Standing Committee note with concern the challenges caused by the timing of the arrival of the audited financial statements, which results in the late delivery of finance-related documents and prevents compliance with Rule 10 of the Rules of Procedure, and request the Secretary General to take the measures necessary to ensure that all non-audit-related financial documents, especially those that are related to requests for additional funds, are circulated in accordance with Rule 10 ahead of the meetings of the Subgroup of Finance in order to facilitate adequate and appropriate consideration of all budgetary matters.***

The Secretary General provided an overview of the issues to be addressed and the supporting documentation (documents SC59 Doc. 8.1, 8.2 and 8.3), noting that they had been prepared on the assumption that COP14 would take place in October 2021. The proposal to postpone COP14 to the last quarter of 2022 would have implications on the recommendations of the Subgroup, with an extraordinary meeting of the COP expected to place in the last quarter of 2021, at which a budget for 2022 would need to be approved.

**Agenda item 1:** SC59 doc.8.1, actions i., ii., iii. and iv.

The Secretary General introduced the elements of document SC59 Doc.8.1 relating to the 2020 financial statements, highlighting the inclusion of the audited statements, and laying out the balances carried forward. She noted the good cash position with implementation limited by the COVID-19 pandemic, income as budgeted and staff costs stable, while drawing attention to an expected rise in provisions. The Secretary General also indicated items for consideration, such as the Secretariat's proposed adjustments to the COP13-approved core budget, possible use of savings and increase of provision of outstanding contributions. Additionally, the increase of outstanding contributions has not been included in the Budget Scenarios, hence a need for a separate allocation.

The Subgroup welcomed the clean audit and recognized the efforts made by the Secretariat to solve the issues and ensure improvements in financial governance and reporting: It noted with satisfaction the signing of the IKI project and closing of Small Grants Funds. The group also encouraged the Secretariat to continue to follow the development of a self-assessment methodology by IUCN, for possible implementation.

*Recommendation for decision by the Standing Committee:*

***The Subgroup on Finance recommends that the Standing Committee:***

- ***accept the 2020 audited financial statements as of 31 December 2020;***
- ***note the core budget results for 2020;***
- ***note the non-core balances and voluntary contributions for 2020;***
- ***note the unspent/uncommitted balances that are carried forward from 2020 to 2021, as described in paragraph 20.***

**Agenda items 3 and 4:** SC59 doc.8.1, actions vi. and vii.

The Secretary General drew attention to paragraphs 35 to 37 of document SC59 Doc.8.1, which reflect adjustments to the COP13-approved budget between budget lines covering staff and travel costs, and propose (in paragraph 37) to present the "other benefits" in one budget line rather than in each budget area.

The group expressed the preference to keep the "other benefits" in budgets line with the staff costs for each budget area for greater transparency. The Secretary General noted that while this was not a problem and would not change the funding amounts themselves, their inclusion in the line with "salaries and social costs" would result in the percentage of the staff and related costs appearing to increase from approximately 69% to 71%, which was still within the range of other conventions.



*Recommendation for decision by the Standing Committee:*

***The Subgroup on Finance recommends that the Standing Committee:***

- ***approve and note the proposed adjustments to the COP13 approved core budget, as described in paragraphs 35 and 36 and presented in column E of the table in Annex 4;***
- ***approve the presentation of the “other benefits” within the merged budget line “salaries, social costs and other benefits” for each budget area in the future budgets, recognizing that this change in location of the funding between budget lines does not reflect a change to funding levels.***

**Agenda items 5 and 6:** SC59 doc.8.1, actions viii and ix.

The Subgroup considered the possible sources of funding proposed by the Secretariat and agreed to include its recommendations in Part II of the report.

**Agenda item 7:** SC59 doc.8.1, action x.

The Chair noted the increase in provisions for outstanding contributions in the 2021 budget, and observed that this would likely apply in 2022 and following years, so further inputs and discussion would be needed to identify sources of funds for the longer term. The Secretary General recalled the recent change in 2019 in the methodology for calculating provisions in line with Swiss law. The Secretariat clarified that the increase was also related to the ageing of outstanding contributions from before 2021.

The group acknowledged the need to provide for the risk of further non-payment of contributions following the COVID-19 pandemic, and supported the conservative approach to the calculation of provisions for outstanding contributions within the current economic circumstances, while observing that provisions for outstanding contributions could fall again once the level of outstanding contributions decreases.

*Recommendation for decision by the Standing Committee:*

***The Subgroup on Finance recommends that the Standing Committee approve the allocation of CHF 72,000 from savings from the 2020 core budget to accommodate the increase of provisions for outstanding contributions in the 2021 budget.***

**Agenda item 8:** SC59 doc.8.1, action xi.

The Secretary General presented the possible uses of 2020 savings listed at paragraph 42 of document SC59 Doc.8.1. She recalled from her previous comments the following further potential use: f) to cover provisions for outstanding contributions in the next triennium (estimated at CHF 360 K for the triennium).

The Secretariat clarified that the funds for proposal c) on the Ramsar Awards would cover the communications element, namely video vignettes on the work of each Award winner. The Subgroup agreed to consider proposal c) once the Standing Committee has decided whether to consider the Ramsar Awards at SC59 or SC60. One member requested the Secretariat to further strengthen

efforts to find potential donors from the private sector to replace Danone, as there is still time to do so.

The group agreed to concentrate on time-sensitive items. These would include: b) funds for World Wetlands Day 2022; and d) web redevelopment in 2021, well before COP14. One member suggested that web development funds might also consider wider technical support such as an online workspace for ongoing Standing Committee discussions.

The Secretary General recalled Resolution XII.2 paragraph 15 and noted that if a) is not approved then the budget scenarios presented in document SC59 Doc.8.3 would have to be reviewed. The Subgroup agreed to consider this item as part of the budget to be approved by the extraordinary meeting of the COP, focusing on the need foreseen for 2022.

The group proposed that item e) COP14 delegate travel should continue to be funded by the non-core voluntary funds, once the modality of COP14 had been ascertained. The group called for the Secretariat to ramp up efforts to find new voluntary funding partners and the Secretariat confirmed this was a fundraising priority.

The Chair proposed that the use of savings to cover provisions for outstanding contributions in the next triennium be considered annually with the figures revised.

*Recommendation for decision by the Standing Committee:*

***The Subgroup on Finance recommends that the Standing Committee approve the following uses of 2020 core budget savings, described in document SC59 Doc.8.1 paragraph 42:***

***For 2021:***

- CHF 25,000 for the development and production of World Wetlands Day 2022 resources;
- CHF 86,000 for improvements to the Convention's website.

***For 2022:***

- CHF 76,000 to cover the core budget gap for core activities of the Secretariat for 2022 (subject to the instructions of the Standing Committee regarding an extraordinary meeting of the COP);

**Agenda item 9: SC59 doc.8.2 Status of annual contributions**

The Secretary General briefly summarized the document, noting that the actions on group confirmation of outstanding contributions had been effective in meeting the auditor's requirements. The group welcomed the news that Contracting Parties in Africa had established a system to allocate the African voluntary contributions. The Chair recalled the upcoming review of the UN General Assembly's scale of contributions, which will come into effect in 2022 and will apply to the next full triennial budget.

*Recommendation for decision by the Standing Committee:*

***The Subgroup on Finance recommends that the Standing Committee:***

- ***take note of the status of annual contributions;***
- ***note the actions listed in paragraphs 14 and 15 on group confirmation of outstanding contributions as part of the audit process;***
- ***note the actions listed in paragraphs 17, 19, 20 and 21 to continue encouraging the payment of annual contributions;***



- ***note the change in annual contributions receivable and in the annual provision against contributions receivable; and***
- ***note the status of the African voluntary contributions.***

**Agenda items 10, 11, and 12:** SC59 doc.8.3 *Budget scenarios for 2022-2024 and draft resolution on financial and budgetary matters*

The Secretary General presented the three scenarios envisaged for the 2022-2024 triennium in document SC59 Doc.8.3. She noted from the previous discussions, and the Chair confirmed, that these scenarios would be considered for 2022 only, in an extraordinary meeting of the COP. Scenario A would include the Finance and Accounting Assistant Position but results in the gap in the core budget of CHF 76K per year to be used from the surplus of the 2019-2021 triennium, and presumes an increase of CHF 120 K in provisions per year. While the Scenario A includes the provision for staff performance bonuses, Scenario B would also include funds for increases in salaries as a result of staff performance management and promotions, and Scenario C would include COP15 hosting costs in the core budget.

The Subgroup supported Scenario A, at least for the 2022 budget. It supported presenting to the extraordinary meeting of the COP a single year rather than three year budget, as has been done by other Conventions during the pandemic. The Secretary General noted the limited means for performance awards under this Scenario, and that one-off awards but not salary increases could be supported without longer-term budget impact. She noted that both mechanisms are part of the IUCN guidelines and policies.

One member requested information on Secretariat staff retention levels to better understand how to address the challenge. Another member would welcome creative measures such as the use of any ongoing savings, while another noted that the reduction in staff number assumptions and establishment of salary/benefit-related adjustments and provisions for the triennium provides implicit coverage for compensation increases. The Secretary General noted that staff salary adjustments are implemented following internal and external equity and labor market analysis to align with IUCN policy, for example in the conversion of Secretariat Interns to Junior Professionals.

The group suggested amendments to the text of the document which would replace “shall” with “is to” (para. 11), “voluntary” with “non-core” (para. 20) and “outstanding dues” with “outstanding contributions” in annex 2 table 1; and refer to “Africa” regional representatives and add “referenced in para 24” after “funds” in para. 25.

The group recalled the need to follow the Rules of Procedure regarding deadlines for submitting documentation to an extraordinary meeting of the COP.

*Recommendation for decision by the Standing Committee:*

***The Subgroup on Finance recommends that the Standing Committee:***

- i. take note of the contents of document SC59 doc.8.3;***
- ii. request the Secretariat to prepare a one-year budget for 2022 for approval by the extraordinary COP based on budget Scenario A at 0% increase presented by the Secretariat; and***
- iii. request the Secretariat to prepare a draft resolution on the budget for approval by the extraordinary COP.***

## **Annex 4**

### **Report of the virtual meeting of the Subgroup on Finance, Part II**

**24 June 2021 13:00 – 13:30, published as in-session document SC59 Com.2**

Part II of the report reflects the decisions made during the meeting of the Subgroup on Finance on 24 June 2021 to complete the Subgroup's recommendations to the Standing Committee for items that had been discussed by the Subgroup on 21 June, but were subject to the relevant Decisions to be taken by the Standing Committee.

#### **Agenda item 5:** SC59 doc.8.1, action viii.

The Subgroup made no recommendation on the allocation for the Review of Resolutions, as this agenda item was postponed by the Standing Committee.

#### **Agenda item 8:** SC59 doc.8.1, action xi, item c)

The record of the discussion of this item is in Part I of the report. The Subgroup made no recommendation on the allocation for communications on the Ramsar Conservation Awards, as this agenda item was postponed by the Standing Committee.

It was noted that consideration will be given to Agenda items 5 and 8 should these items be considered by the Standing Committee in the future.

#### **Agenda item 6:** SC59 doc.8.1, action ix.

The Secretary General highlighted paragraph 39 of document SC59 Doc.8.1, proposing the allocation of savings in the core budget of CHF 90K for the work of the Working Group on the Review of the Strategic Plan. At the time of drafting the present report, a decision had not yet been made by the Standing Committee. For presentation purposes, the core budget for 2021 at Annex 1 to this report shows the allocation of CHF 90K to the budget line "Strategic Plan SP5 (2022 - 2024)" from the budget line "SC58 budget & uncommitted carry forward savings". Should it not be needed, the 2021 budget will be adjusted with the CHF 90K returned to the savings budget line.

#### *Recommendation for decision by the Standing Committee:*

***The Subgroup on Finance recommends that the Standing Committee approve the allocation of CHF 90,000 from savings from the 2020 core budget for the work of the Working Group on the Review of the Strategic Plan, subject to the decision by the Standing Committee to establish a new Working Group or to renew the mandate of this Working Group.***

#### **Agenda item 2:** SC59 doc.8.1, action v.

Representatives of the Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative (IBRRI), the Ramsar Regional Initiative for Central Asia (RRI-CA) and the Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Amazon River Basin summarized their activities over the past months and described the proposed uses to which further funds

received would potentially be applied. The representative of the Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Senegal River Basin was not available during the discussions on this agenda item.

The Subgroup asked for clarity regarding allowable uses of core budget funds for RRI, including whether such funds had been used in the past to support COP delegate attendance (which is not what these funds are intended for) as this would create inequities in allocations of funds for delegates' travel, and expressed concern that such allocations from the Convention's core budget are not audited, suggesting that any recommendation should refer to paragraph 8.d. of Resolution XIII.9 ("RRIs must be financially accountable") to support the required financial accountability of RRI. The group noted that auditing of, or requiring more detailed and certified financial reporting from, those RRI receiving core funds is appropriate, as with any standard financial reporting that is incorporated as a formal expense in the core budget financial statement. The Chair invited ideas on alternative risk management and adequate governance and reporting measures which might be applied. The Secretary General informed the Subgroup of steps taken to ensure transparency in the reports to Standing Committee summarizing the information contained in the annual reports of RRI. She clarified that RRI report on the basis of a template; the Secretariat had originally proposed a revised template to SC58 to increase accountability, and noted that this item had not yet been addressed by Standing Committee.

It was also noted that the presentation of existing reports in Convention languages other than English makes it hard for the Subgroup to evaluate them. Further requirements could also be included in the new RRI operational guidelines currently under development, as well as in future COP finance-related resolutions.

*Recommendation for decision by the Standing Committee:*

***The Subgroup on Finance recommends that the Standing Committee approve the allocation of CHF 25,000 to each of the four eligible RRI for their activities in 2021 from the core budget line D "Support to Regional Initiatives", provided that receiving RRI conform to sub-paragraph 8.d. of Resolution XIII.9.***

***The Subgroup of Finance recommends that the Standing Committee decide that any request for core funds by RRI should include a rationale about how they support Contracting Parties in implementing the Convention and its Resolutions and guidance, and that requests must be provided in English or with an English translation (with informal "google translate" translations, screened by the country's national focal point, acceptable), to enable the Subgroup of Finance to make informed decisions in a timely manner.***

The Subgroup also reiterated that RRI are encouraged to take the necessary steps to achieve financial sustainability to enable their long-term viability, in accordance with Resolution XIII.9 paragraph 25.

Regarding the additional allocation of CHF 10,000 remaining from the 2020 activities requested by the RRI for the Amazon and Senegal River Basins, the Chair proposed to seek more information by email from the RRI, with members pointing out the high residuals for the Amazon RRI, in particular. The Amazon RRI provided additional information by email and during the meeting.

*Recommendation for decision by the Standing Committee:*

***The Subgroup on Finance recommends that the Standing Committee approve, pending confirmation that the funds would be spent in alignment with paragraph 8 of Resolution XIII.9, the remaining budgeted allocation of CHF 10,000 from the original proposal in 2020 of CHF 25,000 to***

*two of the four eligible Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) in the context of Decision SC58-28, for their activities planned in 2020 but delayed to 2021 and for disbursement in 2021, from the 2020 core budget savings, taking into account the current exceptional circumstances of the global pandemic.. The two RRIs are the Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Senegal River Basin (SenegalWet) and the Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Amazon River Basin, and the allocations are made provided that receiving RRIs conform to sub-paragraph 8.d. of Resolution XIII.9 and other relevant rules and regulations related to reporting on use of core funds.*

**Annex 1 to the Report of the Subgroup on Finance**  
**Core Budget 2021**

2021 Ramsar Budget SC59 approved  CHF '000s	Approved budget (COP13- approved with SC59 authorized adjustments) (A)	Authorized use of surplus COP13 XIII.2 (for 2020) (B)	Pre- committed 2020 to be spent in 2021 (C)	SC59 Authorized use of 2020 budget savings (D)	Uncommitted savings 2020 carried forward to 2021 (E)	Total 2021 budget (with uncommitted carry forward) (F=A+B+C+D+E)
<b>INCOME</b>						
Parties' Contributions	3,779	0	0	0	0	3,779
Voluntary contributions	1,065	0	0	0	0	1,065
Income Tax	225	0	0	0	0	225
Other Income (including Interest Income)	12	0	0	0	0	12
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>5,081</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5,081</b>
<b>EXPENDITURES</b>						
<b>A. Secretariat Senior Management and Governance</b>	<b>1,051</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>1,231</b>
Salaries, social costs and other benefits	1,011	0	0	0	151	1,162
Travel	40	5	0	0	24	69
<b>B. Resource Mobilization and Outreach</b>	<b>532</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>902</b>
Salaries, social costs and other benefits	396	0	0	0	45	441
CEPA Program	30	0	53	0	0	83
Comms, Translations, Publications and Reporting Implementation	60	40	79	0	0	179
WWD	0	0	20	25	0	45
50th Anniversary 2021	0	0	8	0	0	8
Web/IT support and Development	36	0	4	0	0	40
Web re-development	0	0	0	86	0	86
Travel	10	5	0	0	5	20

2021 Ramsar Budget SC59 approved  CHF '000s	Approved budget (COP13- approved with SC59 authorized adjustments) (A)	Authorized use of surplus COP13 XIII.2 (for 2020) (B)	Pre- committed 2020 to be spent in 2021 (C)	SC59 Authorized use of 2020 budget savings (D)	Uncommitted savings 2020 carried forward to 2021 (E)	Total 2021 budget (with uncommitted carry forward) (F=A+B+C+D+E)
C. Regional Advice and Support	1,316	10	96	0	225	1,647
Salaries, social costs and other benefits	1,251	0	0	0	200	1,451
Travel	65	10	0	0	25	100
Ramsar Advisory Missions	0	0	96	0	0	96
D. Support to Regional Initiatives	100	0	97	20	0	217
RI WG Res. XIII.9,p9 para 10	0	0	21	0	0	21
Proposal Writing for RRI	0	0	0	0	0	0
Activity 1: Senegal Basin	25	0	0	10	0	35
Activity 2: Amazon Basin	25	0	76	10	0	111
Activity 3: Central Asia	25	0	0	0	0	25
Activity 4: Indo-Burma	25	0	0	0	0	25
E. Scientific and Technical Services	774	5	114	90	328	1,311
Salaries, social costs and other benefits	621	0	7	0	226	854
Travel	20	0	0	0	4	24
Travel STRP Chair	5	0	0	0	7	12
STRP implementation	35	5	35	0	24	99
STRP meetings	50	0	0	0	44	94
Strategic Plan SP5 (2022 - 2024)*	0	0	0	90	0	90
SDG 6.61 (Inventories)	0	0	72	0	0	72
Ramsar Sites Information Service (maintenance and development)	43	0	0	0	23	66
G. Administration/Web	489	11	95	0	16	611
Salaries, social costs and other benefits	334	0	0	0	3	337
Staff hiring and departure costs	60	0	10	0	0	70
Travel	0	0	0	0	0	0
Equipment/Office Supplies	95	0	0	0	13	108

2021 Ramsar Budget SC59 approved  CHF '000s	Approved budget (COP13- approved with SC59 authorized adjustments) (A)	Authorized use of surplus COP13 XIII.2 (for 2020) (B)	Pre- committed 2020 to be spent in 2021 (C)	SC59 Authorized use of 2020 budget savings (D)	Uncommitted savings 2020 carried forward to 2021 (E)	Total 2021 budget (with uncommitted carry forward) (F=A+B+C+D+E)
Planning and Capacity building	0	11	85	0	0	96
H. Standing Committee Services	150	0	17	0	83	250
Standing Committee delegates' support	45	0	0	0	51	96
Standing Committee meetings	10	0	0	0	6	16
SC translation	60	0	0	0	4	64
Simultaneous interpretation at SC meetings	35	0	0	0	22	57
Effectiveness Working Group	0	0	14	0	0	14
Resolutions review (Res. XIII.4)	0	0	3	0	0	3
J. IUCN Administrative Service Charges (max.)	560	0	0	0	0	560
Administration, Human Resources, Finance & IT services	560	0	0	0	0	560
K. Miscellaneous - Reserve Fund	109	0	129	72	420	730
Staff Provisions	50	0	0	0	73	123
Provision for outstanding contributions	0	0	68	72	0	140
SC58 budget & uncommitted carry forward savings	0	0	0	0	416	416
Exchange rate gains / losses	0	0	0	0	(94)	(94)
Legal Services	59	0	61	0	26	145
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>5,081</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>712</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>1,297</b>	<b>7,459</b>

*\*If the Standing Committee decides it is not needed, the allocation will be returned to the "SC58 budget & uncommitted carry forward savings" budget line*

**Annex 2 to the Report of the Subgroup on Finance**  
**Ramsar Proposed Budget 2022**

Ramsar Proposed Budget 2022 CHF 000'S	Budget 2022 for approval by extraordinary COP	SC59 authorised use of 2020 budget savings	Total Budget 2022
<b>INCOME</b>			
Parties' Contributions	3,779		3,779
Voluntary contributions	1,065		1,065
Income Tax	225		225
Income Interest	12		12
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>5,081</b>		<b>5,081</b>
<b>EXPENDITURES</b>			
<b>A. Secretariat Senior Management &amp; Governance</b>	<b>1,030</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1,035</b>
Salaries, social costs and other benefits	990		990
Travel	40	5	45
<b>B. Resource Mobilization and Outreach</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>639</b>
Salaries, social costs and other benefits	438		438
CEPA Program	30		30
Comms, Translations, Publications and Reporting Implementation	60	40	100
Web/IT support and Development	56		56
Travel	10	5	15
<b>C. Regional Advice and Support</b>	<b>1,237</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1,247</b>
Salaries, social costs and other benefits	1,170		1,170
Travel	67	10	77
<b>D. Support to Regional Initiatives</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>
Regional networks and centers	100		100
<b>E. Science and Policy</b>	<b>839</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>844</b>
Salaries, social costs and other benefits	651		651
STRP implementation	35	5	40
Travel STRP Chair	5		5
STRP meetings	50		50
Ramsar Sites Information Service (maintenance and development)	80		80
Travel	18		18
<b>G. Administration</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>492</b>
Salaries, social costs and other benefits	337		337
Staff hiring and departure costs	49		49
Secretariat Staff Travel	0		0
Equipment/Office Supplies	95		95
Planning and Capacity building	0	11	11
<b>H. Standing Committee Services</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>150</b>
Standing Committee delegates' support	45		45



<b>Ramsar Proposed Budget 2022</b>	<b>Budget 2022 for approval by extraordinary COP</b>	<b>SC59 authorised use of 2020 budget savings</b>	<b>Total Budget 2022</b>
<b>CHF 000'S</b>			
Standing Committee meetings	10		10
SC translation	60		60
Simultaneous interpretation at SC meetings	35		35
<b>I. IUCN Administrative Service Charges (maximum)</b>	<b>541</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>541</b>
Administration, Human Resources, Finance & IT services	541		541
<b>J. Miscellaneous - Reserve Fund</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>229</b>
Staff Provisions	20		20
Provision for outstanding contributions	30	120	150
Legal Services	59		59
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>5,081</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>5,277</b>