

**Progress with preparations for COP12, including a) draft MoU; b) high-level/ministerial segment; and c) COP schedule review and proposals**

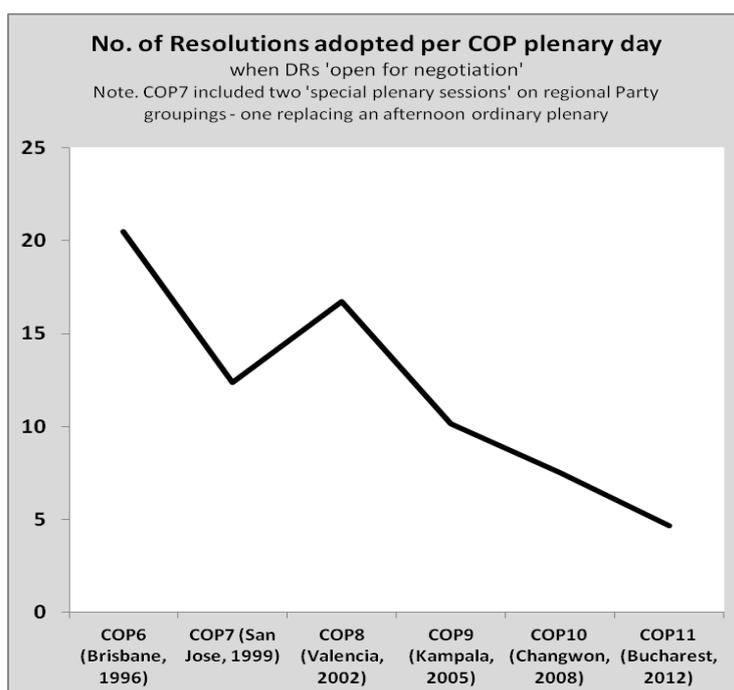
**Action requested.** The Standing Committee is invited to consider and advise on progress and issues, including the preparation of the host country MoU with Uruguay; a possible high-level/ministerial segment at COP12; and an appropriate duration and schedule of COP12.

1. Under this agenda item, the Standing Committee will receive reports from the COP12 host country and the Secretariat. To help inform aspects of the Standing Committee's discussion under agenda items 21 and 22 on COP12 preparations, this note provides information on three aspects of those preparations.
  2. Under agenda item 22 it is anticipated that the Committee may wish to establish a Subgroup on COP12, as has been the case in previous triennia, to oversee and advise on the preparations and delivery of COP12, intersessionally as necessary and meeting face-to-face just prior to the Committee's 47<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> meetings.
- a) Draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)**
3. Prior to COP11 the Secretariat provided Uruguay with information concerning the responsibilities of a COP host country, including aspects of budget.
  4. Parties at COP12 accepted with enthusiasm the offer by the government of Uruguay to host COP12, which needs to be held in 2015.
  5. As a basis for discussions and the conclusion of the MoU with Uruguay for hosting COP12, in September 2012 the Secretariat transmitted the MoU that was signed with the government of Romania for hosting COP11, including an indicative budget.
  6. The Secretariat is in discussions with Uruguay concerning the MoU and anticipates that a teleconference with Uruguay government officials will take place in mid-March in order to further progress these discussions. The Secretariat and Uruguay will report to SC46 on progress and issues for its consideration.
- b) High-level/ministerial segment**
7. The Standing Committee will recall discussions in the last triennium concerning the desirability of the COP host country calling a high-level or ministerial segment during the COP, and the discussions on this matter during COP11 which led to the adoption of relevant text in Resolution XI.1.

8. Resolution XI.1, para. 17, instructs the Standing Committee through an appropriate working group to develop strategies that explore:
    - b) elevation of Ramsar visibility and stature, including *inter alia* enhancing high-level political engagement in the work of the Convention at national, regional and global level; the working group will among other possibilities look into establishing a ministerial segment at the COP including the topics to be addressed at this level.
  9. Under agenda item 8, the Standing Committee will have considered the establishment of this working group (see DOC. SC46-08), which is expected to report to each meeting of the Standing Committee, with the Standing Committee requested to submit a report, including its recommendations, to the 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.
  10. The Standing Committee may wish to seek the views of the COP12 host country concerning inclusion of such a segment in the next meeting of the COP, or it may rather determine to await the findings and recommendations of the Resolution XI.1 working group on this matter.
  11. So as to inform the work of that working group, the Secretariat is currently seeking information from other MEAs that have included such a segment in their COPs, concerning their experiences of different aspects of the scheduling, purpose, content, structure and responsibilities and resourcing (financial and staffing) of such segments.
- c) COP schedule review and proposals**
12. In a post-COP11 review of the preparation and running of COPs, and in the light of perceptions that it proved particularly challenging at COP11 to conclude all negotiations of the Draft Resolution in the time available, especially in relation to Resolution XI.1, the Secretariat has examined trends in COP duration and scheduling since COP6 (Brisbane, 1996).
  13. In response to requests from Parties (including through Resolution VIII.45) and the Standing Committee to find ways of streamlining COP processes, and to achieve cost-savings in relation to the overall duration of COP, there have been a number of progressive changes in the COP schedule and process which have occurred since COP6. In summary these are as follows:
    - i) **Overall length of the COP.** From the opening of the COP in plenary, COP duration has been reduced from nine days (COPs 7 & 8) to 7.5 days (COPs 9-11). However, since this has largely been achieved through moving regional implementation reporting from COP plenary sessions to one- to two-day parallel regional meetings immediately prior to the COP, overall duration of the COP meetings has changed little since COP7.
    - ii) **Streamlining COP to maximize plenary negotiating time for Draft Resolutions.** Several types of change have been introduced: since COP9, the COP no longer includes 1-2½ days of “technical sessions”; the duration of the initial

plenary sessions receiving progress reports (SG, SC Chair, STRP Chair, regional reports, etc.) has been reduced from 3 days (COP6) to 1¼ days (COPs 9-11); and the opening ceremony has been held on the evening before the first full business plenary session. Through these changes, the overall plenary time for negotiating and adopting Draft Resolutions has been increased from 2 days at COP6 to 4¾ days at COP11.

- iii) **Reducing the number of Draft Resolutions (DRs) submitted to COP.** This has been significantly achieved: from the 46 Draft Resolutions (including the DR on “Thanks to the host country”) considered by COP8 (Valencia, 2002), the number has progressively declined, with 33 DRs at COP9, 32 DRs at COP10, and only 22 DRs at COP11 (i.e., less than half the number of DRs negotiated at COP8).
14. The overall outcome of these changes to COP processes has been that Parties have had progressively longer time in COP plenary to negotiate and adopt progressively fewer Draft Resolutions. However, this also indicates that there has been a steady decline since COP6 in the number of DRs that have been adopted per plenary session (see graphic). Hence although a big challenge at COP12 was undoubtedly concluding the negotiations on Resolution XI.1 on institutional hosting, this was not a ‘one-off’ situation but rather appears to be a reflection of a longer-term trend.



15. The reasons behind this trend are not clear, and there may be many. They might include that:
- i) the progressively increasing number of Contracting Parties to the Convention (from 91 at the time of COP6 to 160 at the time of COP11) has meant that more Parties have been engaged in each DR negotiation;

- ii) the world's governments may be less committed now than previously to reaching agreements by consensus;
  - iii) the topics and content of DRs are becoming more contentious for some Parties, as the Convention and COP moves its focus from addressing fairly narrow 'within the wetlands sector' issues to a greater focus on 'cross-sectoral' implementation issues affecting the conservation and wise use of wetlands;
  - iv.) DR negotiations will generally continue for as long a time as is made available.
16. Regardless of the reasons, if this is a continuing trend then it can be anticipated that successfully concluding DR negotiations at COP12 will be an even greater challenge.
17. The Standing Committee may therefore wish to consider possible further changes in COP duration and scheduling for COP12. These might include:
- i) increasing the duration of COP by one day, in order to allow a longer period for negotiations (but noting that there will be financial implications for such an increased duration);
  - ii) further shortening the initial plenary 'reporting' sessions (although these are already little more than one day);
  - iii) seeking ways and means of transmitting an even smaller number of DRs to COP12 (noting that there will remain an irreducible minimum number of such DRs that are needed to ensure continuing Convention processes);
  - iv) considering undertaking the initial 'readings' of DRs in two parallel "working groups" rather than in plenary, which is the current process in some other MEAs (e.g., CBD, CITES, CMS, AEWa) – perhaps with one working group addressing administrative and procedural DRs (including finance and budget) and the other addressing technical DRs.
18. From the experiences of other MEAs whose COPs have such a parallel working group process, there may be both advantages and disadvantages to future Ramsar COPs adopting such a mechanism:
- i) an **advantage** would be that there would be a longer period of time during the COP for consideration of each DR;
  - ii) **disadvantages** could include that one-person Party delegations would not be able to fully participate in the initial negotiations on all DRs; that if such working groups need to approve a revised DR text before its transmittal to plenary for adoption, current Secretariat capacity might be too limited to edit and deliver such revised texts in all Convention languages on such a schedule; and that increased cost, including the need for two interpretation teams for working group days (rather than the current one team for plenaries), would be incurred.

19. Following requests from a number of Parties, a further recommendation for COP12 is that the two days devoted to regional meetings immediately before the COP are formally treated as 'COP days', i.e. the dates announced for COP12 would include these two days. The formal COP opening ceremony would then take place on the evening of the second day. This would *inter alia* facilitate delegates' travel authorizations and visas, and it is noted that these two regional days at COP11 also provided a valuable opportunity for meetings of Regional Initiatives to be held.