

Report of the Youth Working Group

Action requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to note the progress of the Youth Working Group, which has held four virtual meetings. The Working Group has finalised the work plan in accordance with paragraph 17 of Resolution XIV.12, and the Youth Working Group has shifted towards implementation of the work plan.

Background

1. Resolution XIV.12 on *Strengthening Ramsar connections through youth* requested the Standing Committee to establish the Youth Working Group (YWG), with a mandate to advise on mainstreaming youth engagement in the governance, programmes of work, and other activities of the Convention.
2. At its 61st meeting (SC61), the Standing Committee decided on an interim chair and members of the YWG, through Decisions SC61-06 and SC61-07 respectively.
 - a. Australia (co-sponsor of Resolution XIV.12 with Costa Rica) was appointed as the interim Chair.
 - b. Membership of the YWG comprised the following Contracting Parties: Congo, representing the Africa region; Iraq and Iran (Islamic Republic of), representing the Asia region; Austria and Slovakia, representing the Europe Region; Colombia, representing the Latin America and the Caribbean region; and Mexico, representing the North America region.
3. Between SC61 and SC62, the YWG held two virtual meetings and two virtual youth engagement workshops to consult with young people globally and identify priority work for the YWG, leading to a consultancy report, which was used to develop a draft youth workplan.
4. At its 62nd meeting, the Standing Committee took note of the report of the Youth Working Group as presented in document SC62 Doc.17 (Decision SC62-29).

Draft youth workplan

5. After the third meeting of the YWG on 10 August 2023, the first draft of the youth workplan was updated to include feedback received during the meeting. Key points of feedback included:
 - a. the large number of tasks should be refined to prioritise tasks achievable by COP15 in June 2025;

- b. the need to monitor and evaluate our outcomes from the workplan with indicators - for example, metrics such as the number of youth involved;
 - c. the need to avoid replicating existing work, by collaborating with other youth organisations, such as the IUCN Youth Water Program, for sharing of resources on topics such as capacity-building in convention spaces; and
 - d. the suggestion to organise a pre-COP introductory session for new people attending COP15 (particularly aimed at youth).
6. A second draft was then circulated to a wider audience of interested Contracting Parties, for review and feedback over two months from 11 August to 8 October 2023.

Fourth meeting of the YWG

7. The fourth meeting of the YWG was held virtually on 30 November 2023. The invitation was sent to all Heads of Administrative Authorities and National Focal Points of the Contracting Parties to ensure wider consultation on the draft youth workplan.
8. The 1.5 hour meeting was structured with the three thematic areas of the draft workplan presented by different Contracting Parties (Australia, Colombia and Canada), followed by breakout rooms in English and French for discussion on the workplan's outcomes/outputs and tasks.
- a. Discussion was prompted by questions including whether the contents adequately reflected the mandate of the Resolution XIV.12; how tasks should be prioritised and monitored; whether tasks should be changed or removed; budget estimates; and calls for contributions.
9. There was a high level of participant engagement, producing lots of feedback and suggestions. Key points of feedback included:
- a. the need for more actions around knowledge sharing between Contracting Parties;
 - b. improved considerations for Contracting Parties and youth that lack capacity including youths in marginalised and minority groups;
 - c. the need to include tasks for connecting youth working in the field; and
 - d. suggestions for task metrics for monitoring progress.
10. The Chair released a communiqué on 19 December 2023 to the YWG members, sharing a third draft of the workplan, consolidating the feedback from the fourth meeting. A call was made for the final review and feedback on the draft, before the workplan is finalised at the end of February.¹ A follow-up email was sent on 17 January 2024, requesting final inputs.

UNFCCC COP28 side events

¹ The final workplan was published in March 2024, and can be accessed at <https://www.ramsar.org/document/youth-working-group-workplan>.

11. The Convention on Wetlands Secretariat co-hosted with the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) a side event at UNFCCC COP28 on 6 December 2023, called “Empowering youth for wetland conservation and addressing climate change in the Pacific”.
12. Two youth from the Oceania region (Papua New Guinea and Kiribati) joined the panel and presented their experiences with wetlands, alongside the Samoan Environment Minister, the Secretary General of the Convention, the SPREP Director General, the Ambassador of Fiji to Indonesia and the Australian Ambassador of Climate Change.
13. The YWG Chair was invited to present the work of the YWG at a UNFCCC COP28 side event on 10 December 2023 called “Wetlands restoration under climate change: Youth engagement”, hosted by Imperial College London Wetlands Conservation Association.

Final youth workplan

14. The youth workplan is now finalised and the Chairs of the YWG are working with Parties, the members of the YWG and other organisations to begin implementation.

Youth advisor and workplan implementation

15. Paragraph 17 of Resolution XIV.12 requests the employment of a youth advisor in the Secretariat to facilitate youth engagement and projects and to help coordinate this programme of work. As the finances received to date are insufficient to employ a youth advisor, the funds received will instead be used to implement the actions in the youth workplan.