

RAMSAR COP12 HIGHLIGHTS: WEDNESDAY, 3 JUNE 2015

On Wednesday, 3 June, Ramsar COP12 met in plenary throughout the day to address organizational matters and consider the reports: of the Standing Committee (SC); of the Ramsar Secretary General; on the implementation of the Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) Programme; and of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP). Plenary also heard a presentation on “Wetlands in Uruguay” and engaged in a panel discussion on “Innovative Public-Private Partnerships.” The day concluded with the presentation of the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards 2015.

PLENARY

SC Chair Catrinoiu welcomed the incoming Ramsar Deputy Secretary General Ania Grobicki, who emphasized the role of the Convention in helping society to become more sustainable and its links with the SDGs.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Delegates adopted the agenda (COP12 Doc.1) without modifications. On a query from SOUTH AFRICA regarding the late posting of the annotated agenda (COP12 Doc.1bis), Secretary General Briggs explained that this was the first time an annotated agenda was produced for the process and invited feedback. SC Chair Catrinoiu introduced the rules of procedure (COP12 Doc.3), noting that the SC recommended their further discussion. Delegates agreed to rely on the rules of procedure adopted at COP11 (COP12 Doc.27), and to work on proposed amendments in a contact group. CAMEROON proposed clarifications on the roles of officers. SENEGAL suggested altering the periodicity of COP meetings to two years.

The COP elected Jorge Rucks, Under-Secretary, Ministry of Housing, Territorial Planning and Environment, Uruguay, as COP12 President, and José Luis Remedi, Director of Environment, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Uruguay, as an alternate. Plenary elected Scott Johnston (USA) from North America and Eleni Rova (Fiji) from Oceania as Vice-Presidents. COP12 President Rucks called for a holistic vision for wetlands conservation that includes consultation and partnerships based on clear rules, transparency and mutual trust.

REPORTS: Report of the SC Chair: SC Chair Catrinoiu provided an overview of SC activities for the period 2012-2015 (COP12 Doc.5 Rev.1), stressing the need to strengthen parties’ implementation capacity at all levels to achieve the four main goals of the proposed strategic plan.

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Report of the Secretary General: Briggs presented the Secretary General’s report and offered a general overview of the implementation of the Convention, based upon available reports including regional implementation reports (COP12 Doc.8). He remarked that implementation is “best described as work in progress,” but a sense of urgency among parties is increasing. He emphasized, *inter alia*: data gaps about the state of wetlands; the need to reach out to the water and sanitation sector, to the agricultural sector, and into the governance of transboundary aquifers; ongoing work with Danone and IUCN on water management good practices for water companies; and the need to renegotiate the 2009 Services Agreement with IUCN. He invited parties to consider the concept of a global wetlands restoration partnership to bring together existing initiatives.

On a question by UGANDA, Briggs recognized the complexity of land tenure issues and conflicting user rights in the context of wetlands restoration. DENMARK and PAKISTAN asked for more information on synergies with other MEAs, and Briggs described ongoing collaboration with the CBD on the Aichi targets and as part of the Joint Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions, as well as efforts to include wetlands activities within GEF projects. On a question by IRAN and the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO on how to track resolution implementation by parties and the Secretariat, Briggs responded that the primary responsibility for implementation falls upon parties and national stakeholders, with the Secretariat providing information and support for effective implementation. On a suggestion by SOUTH AFRICA, Briggs commented on a new project to disseminate best practices and examples on wetlands wise use and restoration in three languages, and highlighted the opportunities for parties to train in satellite imagery analysis for wetlands management and monitoring.

BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL supported a global wetlands restoration partnership and recalled CBD Decision XII/19 (ecosystem conservation and restoration), which referred to the work of the Ramsar Convention and initiatives that support the conservation and restoration of coastal wetlands, including options to build a “Caring for Coasts” Initiative, as part of a global movement to restore coastal wetlands. IUCN raised several points of clarification on the portions of the report on relationship with IUCN, noting that the biannual meetings with the Secretariat mandated by COP11 have worked well. Briggs clarified that some issues in the report are of historical nature, welcoming continued dialogue with IUCN in the context of the review of the Services Agreement. The United Nations



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Environment Programme (UNEP) reported on collaboration with the Ramsar Secretariat, and announced the launch of the UNEP Sourcebook of Opportunities for Enhancing Cooperation among the Biodiversity-related Conventions at National and Regional Levels, and the imminent finalization of the MoU with the Ramsar Secretariat.

REDMANGLAR INTERNACIONAL lamented the low participation of indigenous peoples in COP12, stressing the need to recognize their contribution via community management to the conservation of wetlands, as well as to adopt the same terminology of the ILO Convention No. 169 on “indigenous and tribal peoples” in the Convention’s resolutions. **AGUARÁ POPÉ** underscored the need to further engage civil society and NGOs in decision-making, awareness-raising activities and Ramsar site nominations, and urged closer collaboration between civil society and parties to achieve effective implementation at the local level.

Report on CEPA Programme: Camilla Chalmers, Ramsar Secretariat, reported on the implementation of the Convention’s CEPA Programme 2009-2015 (COP12 Doc.18). She highlighted the main achievements since COP11, focusing on, *inter alia*: increased impact of the World Wetlands Day; CEPA effectiveness at the regional and national levels; and national-level best practices.

Report of the STRP Chair: STRP Chair Royal Gardner, USA, reported on the STRP’s primary focus on nine priority tasks (COP12 Doc.6), reminding delegates that the Panel is made up of volunteers and supported by the International Organization Partners of the Convention (IOPs) and party representatives, and has close links with the Intergovernmental science-policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). He acknowledged that STRP reports do not suit all audiences, and that the website containing relevant documents should be made more user-friendly. He also remarked how the Asia regional workshop proved useful for engaging with parties, and that regional webinars are now being used. He referenced reports from Birdlife International and UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), which show that over 70% of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) have not been designated as Ramsar sites despite meeting the necessary criteria, and that there is a global increase in vertebrate species in Ramsar sites, which is contradicted in some regions. He also underscored that the fourth Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO-4) demonstrated that wetland species outside of Ramsar sites are in decline.

CHILE opined that the lack of translation in all Convention official languages of STRP documents prevents national experts from benefiting from the STRP’s work and welcomed the regional webinars. **BANGLADESH** thanked the STRP for providing expertise with regards to an oil spill in the Sundarbans, for which the monitoring of possible impacts is ongoing. **IRAN** asked how the Convention bodies link to one another in order to achieve common objectives, with Secretary General Briggs responding that specific plans for each body will be considered in 2016, following the adoption of the strategic plan. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) encouraged COP12 to provide by resolution for a regularly updated State of the World’s Wetlands report, and to mandate the STRP to respond to the outcomes of the UN General Assembly on the SDGs in relation to Target 6.6 on water-related ecosystems and its indicators.

WETLANDS IN URUGUAY: Delegates watched a video showcasing efforts to better manage wetlands in Uruguay, which represent 12% of the national territory with Ramsar sites accounting for 2.5%. Alejandro Nario, National Director of Environment, Ministry of Housing, Territorial Planning and Environment, Uruguay, highlighted synergies between Uruguay’s protected area system, Ramsar sites, national land planning policy and the national biodiversity strategy, underscoring work underway for a national inventory of wetlands as an input for better policy and land planning.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS: Secretary General Briggs presented the long-standing public-private partnership between Ramsar and Danone, one of the world’s largest manufacturers of food and beverage. Laurent Sacchi, Vice-President Chairman, Danone, explained his company’s interest in protecting wetlands, including by engaging local communities in wetland restoration. Bernard Giraud, Livelihoods Fund, gave an account of Danone’s efforts since 2008 to engage other large businesses in creating a common fund for wetland protection around the world, to restore mangroves, improve livelihoods and capture carbon, by engaging in micro-credits projects with local communities. He reported that in total the Fund has raised 40 million US dollars in investments from ten large companies, invested in seven large-scale projects, directly benefiting one million people, and expected to save eight million tons of CO₂ over 20 years.

BRAZIL stressed that these kinds of initiatives lead to socioeconomic benefits and concrete results, bringing the Convention closer to the ground. **MEXICO** called for technical support, noting that intergovernmental agencies lack experience in collaborating with the private sector. **IRAN** highlighted the potential of including officers of private companies in local projects. Sacchi stated that local initiatives may profit from a specialized workforce, and stressed Danone’s willingness to encourage other companies, as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations, to engage in similar efforts. Giraud emphasized the potential for carbon sequestration, pointing to the delivery of the first carbon credits from Senegal to companies investing in the Livelihoods Fund, and noted the benefits for local communities in terms of technical expertise provided by large companies like Hermès.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Following a quiet opening ceremony on Tuesday afternoon and a convivial reception that evening, COP12 got down to business on Wednesday. In the corridors, and during the evening Ramsar Awards reception, participants discussed which agenda items will take the lion’s share of attention. Many anticipated that the proposed strategic plan 2016-2021, its activities and indicators, as the main substantive issues for discussion, while others noted that the proposed Ramsar wetland city accreditation may elicit divergent views. Several delegates also pointed to the draft resolution on peatlands and climate change as a likely candidate to provoke prolonged discussions, noting that any reference to mitigation is inevitably caught in the broader politics of the current negotiations on a future climate change agreement.