



RAMSAR COP12 HIGHLIGHTS: FRIDAY, 5 JUNE 2015

On Friday, 5 June, Ramsar COP12 met in plenary throughout the day to consider draft resolutions. A special session for World Environment Day was held at lunchtime. The contact group on the strategic plan met at lunchtime. The SC finance sub-group met at lunchtime and in the evening. A contact group on Ramsar wetland city accreditation (RWCA) met in the evening.

PLENARY

COP12 President Rucks highlighted that June 5 is World Environment Day (WED2015), under the theme “Seven billion dreams. One planet. Consume with care,” as a reminder of global commitments to the environment and ways to fulfil them, including through the Ramsar Convention. Elizabeth Mrema, UNEP, delivered a statement on behalf of UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner, emphasizing that WED2015 draws attention to the impact on wetlands from increasing global population and a growing middle class. She pointed to the role of wetlands in achieving the SDGs, recommending that sustainable consumption and production remain within ecosystems’ carrying capacity, and that the private sector and decision-makers promote more sustainable behavior. Eneida de León, Minister of Housing, Territorial Planning and Environment, Uruguay, emphasized structural and technological transformation assisting sustainable development, that is compatible with macroeconomic considerations, and provides for equity and participation.

CONSIDERATION OF DRAFT RESOLUTIONS:

Languages and synergies: Continuing discussions from the previous day, the AFRICAN GROUP, LEBANON, the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC and VENEZUELA supported the introduction of Arabic as official language of the Convention.

The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC recommended considering other MEAs’ experiences on whether COP high-level segments increase visibility or produce concrete results. CAMEROON, with BURKINA FASO, stressed that a ministerial segment may reach agreement on issues that COPs are unable to. BENIN noted that high-level segments could ensure greater respect for wetlands and timely payment of contributions. On a question by SENEGAL, UAE responded that a decision on a high-level segment at COP13 should be reached by SC51.

CEPA: COP12 President Rucks introduced a draft recommendation on the CEPA programme 2016-2021 (COP12 DR9).

MALAYSIA, MEXICO and others broadly supported the programme. The US considered the annexed action plan ambitious, and suggested guiding CEPA actions and activities by parties through the SC, and creating a group to set priorities and monitor CEPA activities in the future. The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, INDIA and PANAMA cautioned about budgetary implications, with CHILE suggesting grouping actions within the programme. Finland, on behalf of the EU, suggested: greater links between CEPA and the strategic plan, supported by MEXICO, CANADA, the AFRICAN GROUP, SWITZERLAND, BOLIVIA, PANAMA and NORWAY; monitoring and evaluation of processes; strengthened national participation; and better connection with the STRP.

COLOMBIA called for a systematic analysis of wetland management processes, products and players, and for reference to traditional practices by ethnic groups, and participation by local and vulnerable populations for better wetland management. NORWAY suggested prioritizing World Wetlands Day as a communication tool. IRAN proposed that the Secretariat promote knowledge-sharing among CEPA focal points. PERU noted populations around wetlands are mostly rural and speak indigenous languages, thus requiring specific communication strategies. THAILAND proposed that regional centers support translation. BRAZIL favored “encouraging,” rather than “urging,” translation of guidance into local languages.

GUATEMALA lamented little reference to the intrinsic value of wetlands and to the sharing of knowledge and cultural values. LEBANON highlighted the importance of CEPA in identifying new Ramsar sites, recognizing that many wetlands are on private lands. SAMOA wished to include public appreciation of wetlands as an effectiveness indicator. A revised draft will be tabled by the Secretariat.

City accreditation: COP12 President Rucks introduced a draft recommendation on RWCA (COP12 DR10). UGANDA suggested better defining the benefits of city accreditation. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA and CHINA underscored that RWCA could engage local citizens in wetlands conservation. BRAZIL suggested also including “wetlands sponsors” in local management.

The EU, supported by NORWAY, COLOMBIA, MALAYSIA and others, stressed the need to further examine financial implications and funding opportunities. Tunisia, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, COLOMBIA, URUGUAY and ARGENTINA underscored that RWCA should be voluntary. Cautioning against prescriptive language, the US called for further work on the legal status of accredited cities, and on national accreditation criteria vis-à-vis Ramsar accreditation



criteria. CHINA, supported by UAE, suggested calling the initiative “Wetland City Accreditation of the Ramsar Convention.” WWF and ICLEI - LOCAL GOVERNMENTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY fully supported the draft resolution, noting that 80% of the world’s population will live in cities and urban areas by 2030.

Sweden, on behalf of the EU, underscored the need to accredit not only cities with Ramsar sites but also cities with non-designated wetlands, calling for less restrictive criteria, with MEXICO pointing to sustainable use of wetlands in that regard. THAILAND suggested making use of the CBD’s City Biodiversity Index as a self-assessment guideline. SENEGAL favored accreditation to be valid for six years, and suggested also including “villages and other human settlements.” JAPAN asked if RWCA could be assigned to more than one city when large Ramsar sites border several cities. The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC queried if cities in close proximity to Ramsar sites would automatically be accredited.

COLOMBIA emphasized that cities and wetlands have a complex relationship, influenced by land management and local policy. URUGUAY noted that wetlands provide many ecosystem services in urban and peri-urban areas. ECUADOR called for efforts to reduce population pressures from cities surrounding wetlands.

Water requirements of wetlands: COP12 President Rucks introduced the draft resolution on ensuring and protecting the water requirements of wetlands (COP12 DR12). MEXICO advised that the integration of water protection into national policies allows for synergies between international commitments, national agencies and related initiatives. COLOMBIA, ARGENTINA, the US, CUBA, CANADA, the EU, SWITZERLAND, URUGUAY, BRAZIL and the AFRICAN GROUP supported the draft resolution.

PERU suggested that the STRP should contribute to, but not draft, an action plan. JAPAN and CHILE suggested keeping requests to the STRP in line with its mandate, with CANADA also suggesting a stronger role for the CEPA programme in drawing up action plans. The EU sought stronger support for collaboration among regional initiatives. SWITZERLAND requested greater reference to biodiversity. BRAZIL acknowledged the benefits of properly managed hydroelectric systems, supported by PERU, and the importance of water for agriculture. The AFRICAN GROUP proposed reference to a certain volume of water “of adequate quality, quantity and timing,” and sought clarification on the use of the term “preventive action.” A revised draft recommendation will be prepared by the Secretariat.

Peatlands: COP12 President Rucks introduced the draft resolution on peatlands, climate change and wise use: implications for the Ramsar Convention (COP12 DR11), with DENMARK emphasizing links with CBD Aichi Target 15 (restoration of degraded ecosystems). The EU, the AFRICAN GROUP and the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO supported the draft resolution. BELARUS and CHINA suggested underscoring the importance of sharing best practices.

NORWAY read a statement by the Nordic Council of Ministers of the Environment recognizing peatlands’ importance for preserving biodiversity and limiting human-induced climate change, stressing multiple benefits arising from peatlands restoration, and committing to incorporate peatland restoration into the future climate agreement. SWITZERLAND requested reference to the Nordic statement in the resolution text, with

COLOMBIA noting that inserting a mention of peatlands in the negotiating draft of the new climate agreement would be complex.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION suggested referring to the key findings of the Global Assessment on Peatlands, Biodiversity and Climate Change, that was taken into account by CBD COP9. CANADA proposed references to, *inter alia*: peatland restoration, in addition to conservation; peatlands’ role as a vital ecological reserve; and wetlands management to increase resilience to climate change and extreme climatic events. INDONESIA proposed reference to peatlands aiding natural disaster risk reduction. CAMEROON requested consideration of the role of mangroves.

NEW ZEALAND and the US supported work on peatlands and carbon sequestration, while suggesting further clarification on the respective roles of the UNFCCC and the Ramsar Convention. PANAMA supported the STRP’s work in developing guidelines for peatlands inventories, while CHILE cautioned that the STRP should consider the complex nature of different types of peatlands. CHINA, supported by ARGENTINA and PANAMA, proposed that the STRP also develop an inventory of peatland sites as wetlands of international importance.

BRAZIL expressed opposition to sectoral approaches to climate change, arguing in particular that mitigation should primarily be a question of reducing fossil fuel consumption by developed countries, and suggested eliminating references to mitigation and adaptation as ecosystem services provided by peatlands. ARGENTINA, BOLIVIA, CUBA and VENEZUELA supported this, expressing concern about prejudging ongoing negotiations under the UNFCCC. BRAZIL and VENEZUELA also requested deletion of language on: REDD+, supported by BOLIVIA; land-related portions of a new climate agreement, supported by COLOMBIA; and agriculture and land use in relation to climate change. MEXICO supported the consideration of mitigation and adaptation as ecosystem services provided by peatlands, and, supported by COLOMBIA, the inclusion of a mention of peatlands in both tropical and temperate regions. A Friends of the President’s group was formed to continue discussions.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Friday saw parties advance on some thorny issues without being scathed in the process. The group on the strategic plan focused on the vision for the Convention, with proposals reasonably aligned, seeking to incorporate all aspects of wetlands management (conservation, sustainable use and restoration). Practicalities, however, slowed progress: some participants wondered whether a more efficient way to deal with text proposals in different languages is needed in order to wrap up the work on time.

Meanwhile, the proposed city accreditation received greater initial support than had been envisioned, with several delegates expressing hope that the draft resolution on the topic may be quickly adopted. Some wondered, however, whether this initiative should focus on supporting the implementation of the Convention (i.e. cities near Ramsar sites) or whether it should take a broader and less literal approach, thereby also allowing cities with non-designated wetlands to join the accreditation scheme. While some were optimistic that this innovative idea will help to involve local partners in implementing the Convention, others were cautious about diffusing the Ramsar spirit beyond wetlands of international importance.