



RAMSAR COP12 HIGHLIGHTS: SATURDAY, 6 JUNE 2015

On Saturday, 6 June, plenary met throughout the day to consider the remaining draft resolutions on the Ramsar COP12 agenda. Friends of the President groups on the strategic plan and on peatlands met throughout the day. The SC finance sub-group met at lunchtime and in the evening. A contact group on Ramsar wetland city accreditation, and the appointees to the incoming SC 2015-2018 met in the evening.

PLENARY

COP12 President Rucks reported that the contact group on the strategic plan formed a Friends of the President group. FINLAND reported on progress in the Friends of the President group on peatlands, which formed a drafting group to prepare a revised draft resolution.

PRESENTATION: Sibylle Vermont, Switzerland, delivered a presentation on “International Water Governance: nothing fishy about it.” She focused on the water dimension of the Ramsar Convention and the family of water-related conventions, including the UN Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses and the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes under the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), calling for increased cooperation among them.

CONSIDERATION OF DRAFT RESOLUTIONS: New framework for scientific and technical advice: COP12 President Rucks introduced the draft resolution on a proposed new framework for scientific and technical advice and guidance to the Convention (COP12 DR5). ARGENTINA, the EU, BRAZIL, SWITZERLAND and others supported restructuring the STRP, in particular for a stronger regional balance.

The UK for the EU, NEW ZEALAND, PANAMA, the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, JAMAICA and INDIA proposed extending the maximum number of terms for STRP members to two or three triennia, with NEW ZEALAND also proposing that at least six members be retained between triennia. PANAMA suggested that members could return to the STRP in a different capacity, as they would be selected for their own expertise and not be representing their government or organization. CHILE proposed that new experts could be included in the STRP, if they fill knowledge gaps.

The EU favored a detailed agenda and work plan with priorities and, with PANAMA, sought clarification on the Secretariat’s role. IRAN called on the Ramsar Secretariat to ensure a stronger link between the STRP and national focal points. SWITZERLAND advised on keeping the framework in

line with the strategic plan. The US, supported by MEXICO and SENEGAL, underscored that COP12 should establish clear priorities and supportive mechanisms to enable the STRP to achieve its work plan goals. The PHILIPPINES proposed as a priority action for the STRP to update Ramsar Wise Use Handbook 18 (managing wetlands). Uganda, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, and MALAYSIA suggested referring to “extractives industries” to include forestry, rather than just the mining sector, in addressing the drivers of wetland loss and degradation. URUGUAY recommended considering the economic and non-economic services provided by wetlands and the inclusion of non-monetary evaluation methods. COLOMBIA proposed referring to IPBES and encouraged parties to standardize and validate national- and regional-level methodologies on valuing wetlands’ environmental goods and services.

JAPAN proposed adding the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to the list of observer organizations, and COLOMBIA proposed the Amazon Cooperation Treaty. BRAZIL encouraged further engagement with parties in scientific matters. INDIA underscored the need for specific fundraising for the STRP. BOLIVIA, supported by URUGUAY and COLOMBIA, called for recognizing local and indigenous peoples as important expert groups, and suggested their participation in an inter-scientific dialogue.

Disaster risk reduction: COP12 President Rucks introduced the draft resolution on wetlands and disaster risk reduction (COP12 DR13). EL SALVADOR suggested reference to other mechanisms of wetland management in the context of institutional collaboration. ARGENTINA, supported by CANADA, VENEZUELA, SWITZERLAND, JAPAN, the EU, BRAZIL, AUSTRALIA and INDIA, suggested referencing the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

Benin, for the AFRICAN GROUP, supported by BRAZIL, requested references to coastal erosion in the list of disasters. The UAE and IRAN recommended adding dust and sandstorms, and the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC suggested including hurricanes and storms. CANADA suggested a reference to the Caring for Coasts Initiative and, with the EU, BRAZIL and NORWAY, to CBD Decision XII/19 (ecosystem conservation and restoration). NEW ZEALAND suggested encouraging parties to ensure disaster risk reduction plans do not compromise the ecological character of Ramsar sites. THAILAND and SWITZERLAND requested reference to the need to consider biodiversity safeguard measures. JAPAN suggested “recovering and maintaining ecosystems’ functions” to focus on the positive impacts of ecosystem-based management.



The EU cautioned against the STRP reviewing resolutions from previous COPs, supported by BRAZIL, and called for consistent use of the term “indigenous peoples and local communities.” HONDURAS requested, with MEXICO and ECUADOR, reference to existing instruments and plans designed for resource management adapted for wetlands, and asked for clarifications on whether “displaced persons” refer to displacements because of disasters or include those of a preventive nature. MEXICO suggested referring not only to preparedness and early warning, but also contingency measures. GUINEA proposed focusing not only on coastal wetlands, but also inland ones. URUGUAY called for the inclusion of innovative approaches and of territories surrounding wetlands, and suggested urging parties to include risk reduction in their own policies and management plans. INDIA highlighted the need for increased cooperation with specialized institutions towards effective ecosystem-based approaches for risk management. The US recommended integrating not only climate change adaptation but also mitigation in development policies and planning.

COLOMBIA recommended encouraging parties to: not only reduce vulnerability of people, but also of ecosystems; allow for the effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in national plans and programmes; allow for the effective participation of wetland-dependent displaced persons in strategies for disaster risk reduction; and ensure consistency between ecosystem-based approaches and traditional approaches to disaster risk reduction.

Status of Ramsar Sites: COP12 President Rucks introduced the draft resolution on the status of Sites in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance (COP12 DR6). SENEGAL presented a message on behalf of his Minister of Environment on actions taken to address threats to wetlands. UKRAINE reported on the impact of unrest in Crimea on managing and reporting on Ramsar sites. BELARUS and ARGENTINA noted delays in updating the Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS).

BELARUS, BRAZIL and UGANDA pointed to BirdLife International’s IBAs database to aid assessments. BRAZIL, with NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA, MEXICO and URUGUAY, expressed caution on the use of the IUCN World Heritage Outlook, requesting that the Secretariat provide options for its use to COP13. SWITZERLAND and ARGENTINA suggested a review by the STRP in the context of increasing synergies. MEXICO and the UK underlined the need to raise the political profile of the Montreux Record at the national level to stimulate further action. UGANDA suggested a review of the effectiveness of the Montreux Record questionnaire before it is redesigned.

COLOMBIA called for balancing conservation with indigenous peoples’ rights. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) called for balancing wetland conservation and development. JAMAICA noted efforts to mitigate negative impacts through the construction of coastal protection barriers. WWF asked about the status of the Poyang Lake Control Project, underscoring its importance as a bird wintering habitat, with CHINA stating the proposal has yet to be approved.

Regional initiatives 2016-2018: COP12 President Rucks introduced the draft resolution on regional initiatives 2016-2018 in the framework of the Convention (COP11 DR8). PANAMA, supported by Uganda for the AFRICAN GROUP, suggested the Secretariat be responsible for the promotion of regional initiatives. Hungary, on behalf of the EU, proposed that regional initiatives receiving funding should demonstrate effectiveness, with MEXICO suggesting funded activities contribute to the strategic plan. SENEGAL noted legal and financial discrepancies concerning regional initiatives. MEDWET noted they will submit

a review of the guidelines for the Ramsar regional initiatives at SC51. A revised draft recommendation will be prepared by the Secretariat.

Mediterranean Basin island wetlands: COP12 President Rucks introduced the draft resolution on the conservation of Mediterranean Basin island wetlands (COP12 DR14). SENEGAL asked for a legal opinion on whether a draft resolution may refer to a particular region, and questioned whether it could be annexed to the draft resolution on regional initiatives, noting that all island wetlands should be included. GREECE noted reference in the draft to non-Mediterranean island wetlands. The EU noted that an extension of the scope to the global level has been considered and a draft resolution will be prepared for COP13. SENEGAL withdrew his request. A revised draft recommendation will be prepared by the Secretariat.

Evaluating and ensuring Ramsar Sites’ effective management and conservation: COP12 President Rucks introduced the draft resolution on evaluating and ensuring Ramsar Sites’ effective management and conservation (COP12 DR15). BELARUS, the PHILIPPINES, UAE, OMAN and Seychelles for the AFRICAN GROUP supported the draft resolution. ARGENTINA requested the STRP’s input on the proposal, and emphasized the Ramsar Site Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (R-METT) as a tool for self-assessment, not for external evaluation. URUGUAY requested linking the R-METT with the strategic plan and asking parties to report periodically on their evaluations. SOUTH AFRICA and the EU underscored the need to integrate all reporting requirements to avoid administrative burdens on local authorities. NEW ZEALAND suggested that parties use R-METT when preparing national and site reports. CANADA suggested reporting on R-METT at least every six years, or when submitting Ramsar Site Information Sheets, while the DRC noted the need to establish criteria on tools and indicators. MEXICO and PERU cautioned on the resource implications of evaluations. THAILAND requested adding socioeconomic criteria regarding indigenous and local communities, in addition to biological and hydrological criteria.

SC role and regional categorization: COP12 President Rucks introduced the draft resolution on the SC’s responsibilities, roles and composition, and regional categorization of countries under the Convention (COP12 DR4). DENMARK, supported by many, called upon: the Secretariat to report on progress in implementing previous COP resolutions and a work plan on COP12 resolutions; and the incoming SC to take on board a 360 degree review. CANADA recalled Resolution XI/19 allowing countries to participate in neighboring regional groups where appropriate. ARGENTINA supported the renaming of the Neotropics region to Latin America and the Caribbean. South Africa, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, called for equal voting across all regions.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Saturday morning started with a lively warm-up exercise with delegates enthusiastically responding to questions on Ramsar and international water conventions by a Swiss delegate. Moods mellowed during the day, however, with participants expressing frustration regarding the slow return of revised texts, fearing late-night working sessions during COP12’s final days. A peeved negotiator compared the electronic submission system for proposed amendments to the Secretariat to a “black hole,” wondering whether it prevented some proposals from being incorporated into revised draft resolutions. By Saturday evening, however, several groups were seen working hard to make progress, after plenary completed the first review of all 15 draft resolutions tabled for COP12 – just in time for delegates to enjoy Sunday’s field trips.