



RAMSAR COP12 HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY, 4 JUNE 2015

On Thursday, 4 June, Ramsar COP12 met in plenary throughout the day and started consideration of draft resolutions. A working group met at lunchtime and in the evening to discuss the draft resolution on financial and budgetary matters. A working group on the rules of procedure met in the evening.

PLENARY

The COP elected the SC members for the coming triennium. Secretary General Briggs read a statement from the Secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in response to a SC48 invitation to participate in COP12, recognizing, *inter alia*, the crucial role of: wetlands in maintaining an emissions balance and moving towards a new model of growth; the management and wise use of wetlands to meet the climate challenge; and collaborative actions to benefit the environment, citizens and the economy.

BRAZIL, with ARGENTINA, emphasized that the statement originates from the UNFCCC Secretariat, not from UNFCCC parties, with BRAZIL stressing that the UNFCCC is the appropriate global forum to address climate change. Briggs explained that the statement offers clarifications on common ground between the mandates of the Ramsar Convention and the UNFCCC.

PRESENTATION ON SDGS: Jane Madgwick, Wetlands International, delivered a presentation on whether the SDGs could help save wetlands. She stated that because of the link with water, all SDGs depend on the improved status of wetlands, but noted the need to make this link explicit in SDG indicators, such as on: the role of wetlands in regulating water flows in the landscape, to help combat desertification; opportunities for wetlands to benefit from investments in water distribution systems and in increased resilience to natural disasters; better management and restoration of coastal wetland ecosystems; and the role of water in sustainable production and consumption. She concluded that “on paper” the SDGs provide the best opportunity in the Ramsar Convention’s history to bring wetlands to the center of the development agenda. The CBD reported on collaboration with the Ramsar Secretariat over the past two years to contribute, through UN-Water, to the SDGs process, and recommended synthesizing existing Ramsar monitoring information as an input to the discussion on SDG indicators. FINLAND suggested further discussion in a contact group.

FINANCIAL REPORT: SC Finance Subcommittee Chair Elizabeth Roberts, Canada, delivered a presentation on the execution of the budget for the triennium 2012-2015 and on options to be adopted for the 2016-2018 budget period (COP12 Doc.14 and 15). On a question by SENEGAL, Secretary General Briggs clarified that the core budget scenarios include one permanent regional officer for Africa. IRAN and HONDURAS suggested that parties provide translations in kind, while CHILE cautioned that having translations in the core budget is a priority for Latin America. On a question from IRAN, Roberts explained that the budget spending criteria are approved by the SC and based on: staff needs to provide required support to parties, resolutions taken by parties, and the Strategic Plan. On a question by PANAMA, Briggs clarified that a second partnership officer is included in the budget scenarios, while regional officers (other than for Africa) would depend on additional financing, but are not part of the core budget scenarios presented. SWITZERLAND recommended that COPs should be financed by the core budget, as in other MEAs, reducing financial burdens on the host country and donors, with Briggs noting that this would require a decision by parties. On a question from SENEGAL, Briggs clarified that Ramsar advisory missions have not been approved by the SC to be included in the proposed core budget, but relate to existing funds. He also responded to COLOMBIA and SWEDEN that the small grants fund and improvements to the Ramsar database have not been approved by the SC to be included in the proposed core budget, and would require additional support from donors. He concluded that parties will ultimately decide on budget scenarios with a 0%, 2% or 4% increase and define which activities to include.

CONSIDERATION OF DRAFT RESOLUTIONS:

Strategic plan: COP12 President Rucks introduced the proposed Ramsar strategic plan 2016-2021 (COP12 DR.2). BOLIVIA called for a more holistic view of wetlands, noting their services and cultural values, including for indigenous peoples and water access. Latvia, speaking on behalf of the European Union Member States present at COP12 (EU), suggested improving synergies between the Ramsar Convention and other MEAs and, supported by PANAMA, carrying out additional work on indicators. South Africa, speaking on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, suggested “urging,” rather than “encouraging,” parties to establish their national targets and plans, and allocate national budget resources to implement the strategic plan. SENEGAL also recommended: providing greater support at the regional



level for the development of national strategic plans; requesting the SC to further support wetland restoration; strengthening bilateral cooperation; and setting measurable interim targets.

The EU suggested extending the strategic plan's timeline to 2024, supported by SWITZERLAND and NORWAY, who favored allowing for a mid-term review; improving linkages with the CBD in reference to the Aichi targets; and referring to forestry and agricultural systems, as well as under-represented ecological regions, within the targets. MALAYSIA, INDIA, MEXICO, NORWAY and JAPAN called for greater synergy with the CBD Strategic Plan 2011-2020, the Aichi targets, and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs).

MALAYSIA suggested that national wetland inventories (target 8) be initiated, but not expected to be completed. INDIA proposed including the provision of adequate funding to support international cooperation (target 17). CANADA sought explicit reference to the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) in the context of international cooperation. NORWAY recommended: a more positive and inspiring vision; more focused and measurable targets; more emphasis on the role of wetlands for sustainable development and the provision of ecosystem services; and a list of priority actions. MEXICO suggested including methodologies in target 13 (scientific and technical guidance).

TURKEY objected to several references to transboundary cooperation for wetlands, noting that this is a bilateral issue that should not include third parties. CHILE expressed concern about percentage targets, underscoring the need to allow for different countries' implementation capacities. NEW ZEALAND preferred referring to countries' monitoring progress in implementation and reporting "as appropriate," to allow for different types of processes. BRAZIL requested further reference to sustainable fisheries as a key sector. NICARAGUA, BOLIVIA, ECUADOR, CUBA, COLOMBIA and VENEZUELA suggested references to the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities and to their role in wetland protection, management and monitoring, while JAPAN proposed a reference to the active participation of local people in target 5 on effective planning and management. PANAMA and URUGUAY made several proposals to better align targets with their respective indicators. BOLIVIA requested references to the rights of Mother Earth and the recognition of the intrinsic value of nature. ARGENTINA, supported by the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, questioned the reference to the "eradication" of invasive species in target 4, noting difficulties in successful implementation and monitoring.

The UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) welcomed collaboration with the Ramsar Convention to facilitate the healthy stabilization of wetlands, underscoring that wetlands protection can support poverty reduction, food and water security, and climate action. Parties agreed to continue discussions on the draft resolution in a contact group.

Resource mobilization and partnership framework: COP12 President Rucks introduced the document on resource mobilization and partnership framework, and the proposal to add Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) as an IOP (COP12 DR7). The AFRICAN GROUP, supported by many, favored adding WWT as an IOP, with CHILE and ARGENTINA requesting a decision by parties to determine the maximum number of IOPs that may be added.

JAPAN, supported by CHILE, noted that allocation of national budgets to wetland management depends upon the individual countries' economic situation. BRAZIL, supported

by CHILE, CUBA, ARGENTINA and URUGUAY, urged for specific reference to developed countries in the call for increased contributions and cooperation for the successful implementation of the strategic plan. The US, with SWITZERLAND, suggested including fundraising targets and timetables in the revised draft resolution and associated workplan. The UK, on behalf of the EU, underscored the importance of domestic resource mobilization and called for incorporating wetlands into NBSAPs to allow for funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF). IRAN highlighted the importance of directing national budgets to reduce the effects of development projects on wetlands. Upon a proposal by SENEGAL, a contact group on resource mobilization was formed.

Languages and synergies: On a draft decision on enhancing the Convention's languages, visibility and stature, and increasing synergies with other MEAs (COP12 DR.3), the UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE), the AFRICAN GROUP, CHINA, JAPAN and others supported the inclusion of Arabic as an official language for the Convention. The EU suggested that: financial considerations should be taken into account; concerned parties should ensure availability of funding; and the SC Management Working Group should monitor progress in the phased approach to language integration.

CANADA considered it premature to call for the implementation of the recommendations of the UNEP project on cooperation among biodiversity-related conventions, as these are not yet issued. NORWAY, with SWITZERLAND, supported improving synergies with other MEAs and IPBES, to make use of the best available knowledge, while underscoring the need for national-level action.

CHINA, with COLOMBIA, SENEGAL and others, supported the establishment of a high-level segment at future Ramsar COPs to improve visibility and increase political support. The EU, with the US, the AFRICAN GROUP, ARGENTINA, MEXICO and URUGUAY, supported that the organization of high-level segments should be decided by the host country to each COP. SWITZERLAND cautioned about additional costs, and suggested giving high-level segments a theme to incentivize ministers' participation. JAPAN suggested holding a high-level segment at alternate COPs to enhance cost effectiveness. MEXICO suggested organizing a side event on Ramsar at CBD COP13. TURKEY pointed to UNCCD COP12 to be held in Ankara later in 2015 as an opportunity to increase cooperation between the two conventions.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Thursday's plenary discussions overflowed into the corridors with delegates pondering how to separately negotiate the strategic plan and the budget, given their intimate connection. Some delegates stressed that the strategic plan should take precedence, and budget lines should be aligned to specific priorities within the strategic plan. Others were concerned that, with most strategic plan activities going to be covered by the non-core budget, there is a need to prioritize them in order to guide the Secretariat in looking for additional funding. In any case, with a very constrained budget, parties understand that accommodating all their requests is going to require some serious shoehorning. The proposals for greater synergy with the CBD Strategic Plan 2011-2020 was thus considered helpful by some, to piggyback on GEF funding, but others wondered: "Would this come at a cost to Ramsar's drive for increased political recognition?"