

## Ramsar COP14 Highlights: Saturday, 12 November 2022

Alternate COP14 President Wu Zhimim, acting as President, welcomed delegates back after a day without COP meetings that included field trips to the aquarium and a Ramsar Site and, for some, continued consultations on draft resolutions. The plenary worked its way through revised documents and by the end of the day had adopted 12 of 22 resolutions, including, by a simple majority vote, Ukraine's proposal on the environmental emergency relating to damages to Ramsar wetlands.

### Plenary

**Organizational matters:** Plenary received nominations for members (and alternates) to represent the Convention's six regions on the 2022-2025 Standing Committee and appointed the members of the Credentials Committee. Credentials Committee Chair Esfandri Nurbi (Indonesia) reported the committee had validated 121 credentials. In response to a request from the COP14 President, the Legal Advisor confirmed that the quorum requirements had been met for COP14 delegates to make decisions on all issues.

### Consideration of Draft Resolutions

**Environmental emergency relating to damage to Ramsar wetlands:** UKRAINE presented a second revised draft of the document (COP14 Doc.18.24 Rev.2). The UK, MEXICO, JAPAN, Czechia, on behalf of the EU, along with others, supported the proposal. They emphasized, *inter alia*, that all wetlands, particularly Ramsar Sites, must be protected and stressed the need to assess, monitor, and restore damaged wetlands in Ukraine. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION, CHINA, CUBA, VENEZUELA, and others opposed the resolution, stating the motion goes beyond the mandate of the Convention and the language remains politicized. Citing "obvious and apparent divergence" among the parties' views that precluded consensus and, following the Convention's Rule of Procedure 39.1 on consensus and voting, the COP14 President scheduled a vote for the afternoon.

Before the vote, the Legal Advisor clarified that adoption of the draft resolution required a simple majority of those present and voting, with "present and voting" meaning those casting an affirmative or negative vote. Following technical issues, Ukraine exercised its right under Rule 44.1.b of the Convention's Rules of Procedure for a roll-call vote to take place. The plenary adopted the draft resolution with 50 parties in favor, 7 against, and 47 abstaining.

**Financial and budgetary matters:** The revised version of the draft resolution (COP14 Doc.18.1 Rev.1) was considered by plenary and adopted.

**Responsibilities, roles and composition of the Standing Committee and regional categorization of Countries:** The Secretariat presented the revised version (COP14 Doc.18.2 Rev.1). Czechia, on behalf of the EU, supported by AUSTRALIA and others, and with a reservation by SWEDEN, asked to retain text expressing gratitude to the outgoing SC Chair, as well as text appreciating improvements made by the Secretariat in performance, management, and optimization of resources. A contact group met in the afternoon to work on updated text.

**Effectiveness and efficiency of the Ramsar Convention:** The UK reported agreement by the contact group on minor changes included in the revised document (COP14 Doc.18.3 Rev.1), which plenary adopted.

**Review of the Fourth Strategic Plan and key elements for the Fifth Strategic Plan:** AUSTRALIA reported agreement by the contact group on the revised draft (COP14 Doc.18.4 Rev.1), which plenary adopted.

**Strengthening Ramsar connections through Youth:** AUSTRALIA reported agreement on the revised draft proposal (COP14 Doc.18.14 Rev.1). YOUTH ENGAGED IN WETLANDS thanked delegates for recognizing the passion of youth, creating ways to engage, and providing hope for the future. Plenary adopted the revised proposal.

**Wetland education in the formal education sector:** The REPUBLIC OF KOREA noted consensus on including reference to informal and non-formal education in the resolution. Plenary adopted the revised proposal (COP14 Doc.18.13 Rev.1).

**Review of Ramsar criteria, and delisting Ramsar Sites:** The COP14 President noted that the draft resolution (COP14 Doc.18.16 Rev.1) would be deferred until COP15.

**Status of Sites in the List of Wetlands of International Importance:** Delegates considered the revised document (COP14 Doc.18.15 Rev.1). ALGERIA reported compromise by parties to include a request to the Secretariat "to include sites on the Ramsar List in accordance with Article 2.1 of the Convention, while taking due account of geographical coordinates provided by the UN Geospatial Network." Informal consultations were to continue.

**Future implementation of scientific and technical aspects for 2023-2025:** The Secretariat presented the revised document

(COP14 Doc.18.17 Rev.1). Some delegations, including SWITZERLAND, BRAZIL, and ZIMBABWE requested more time to discuss the revisions, with some noting their contributions were not included. The COP14 President suggested an informal session for further consultations.

**New CEPA approach:** SWEDEN introduced a revised draft (COP14 Doc.18.10 Rev.1). Germany, on behalf of the EU, proposed amendments to the proposed CEPA activity on wetland benefits being featured in national/local policy strategies and plans, including removal of text recognizing the value, experiences, and resources of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. BRAZIL opposed the amendment. ZAMBIA asked for a clear distinction between Indigenous Peoples and local communities to better reflect national circumstances. The COP14 President asked parties to resolve differences in informal consultations.

**Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) - operational guidelines:** On the draft resolution (COP14 Doc.18.9 Rev.1), COSTA RICA informed delegates that the contact group had not yet reached consensus. Further discussions were deferred until the text is available on the website.

**Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards:** SWEDEN presented the revised version (COP14 Doc.18.11 Rev.1). NEW ZEALAND supported adding an award on Indigenous Peoples' Conservation and, on Wise Use proposed a minor amendment to the criteria. AUSTRALIA proposed that if the body making a nomination is not an Indigenous community, that the proposal be accompanied by a letter of support from the relevant community as a matter of best practice. The plenary adopted the resolution with the proposed amendments.

**Enhancing the conservation and management of small wetlands:** CHINA updated delegates on the draft resolution (COP14 Doc.18.18 Rev.1). After a brief discussion on the definition of small wetlands, plenary adopted the revised resolution.

**Review of all previous resolutions and decisions, and Draft list of defunct resolutions:** Delegates suggested amendments regarding the proposed task force group for considering the status of SC decisions and approaches for adaptive implementation. The COP14 President requested the Secretariat incorporate all comments and seek clarifications directly with delegates.

**Waterbird population estimates to support new and existing Ramsar Site designations:** The UK, AUSTRALIA, NORWAY, and Finland on behalf of the EU (reservation from SWEDEN) requested the Scientific and Technical Review Panel develop a technical proposal on updates to waterbird population estimates and technical support guidance, in particular for developing country parties. The draft resolution (COP14 Doc.18.21 Rev.1) was adopted.

**Protection, management and restoration of wetlands as nature-based solutions to address the climate crisis:** Proposed amendments in the revised resolution (COP14 Doc.18.20 Rev.3) included changes to its title. BRAZIL said the proposed revision brought together divergent views among parties who were concerned that the concept of nature-based solutions (NbS) may

be misused, misinterpreted, or used as a silver bullet. Proponents for retaining the term “NbS” said it can help unlock access to funds for wetlands, noting the relevance to climate issues. Some parties stressed the resolution text is only intended to be used within the context of the Convention and has no implications for other conventions.

After COP14 President Wu urged parties to respect the consensus achieved over two days of hard work, the plenary adopted the revised resolution.

**Updating the Wetland City Accreditation of the Ramsar Convention:** The REPUBLIC OF KOREA reported consensus on most paragraphs of the resolution (COP14 Doc.18.12 Rev.1), noting suggestions that the new Independent Advisory Committee should begin after COP14. AUSTRIA noted that the draft resolution requires a short time to build consensus on pending sections. COP14 President requested an informal consultation to complete the revision.

**Proposal to establish an International Mangrove Center as an RRI:** CHINA reported consensus from the contact group to establish the center as an RRI (COP14 Doc.18.22 Rev.2) and the resolution was adopted.

The COP14 President adjourned the plenary, wishing parties good luck with finding common ground on the remaining draft resolutions.

### *In the Corridors*

“We seldom vote, right? Twice in 51 years. So we are still learning,” said the COP14 President in the midst of technical glitches over the procedure brought about by the vote on the Ukraine resolution. At first, delegates were confused by instructions on which button to push for a yes, no, or abstain vote. Then they were unable to use their microphones to communicate with the President because the voting system disabled the microphone system. Finally, Ukraine exercised the right to request a roll-call vote, which the Legal Expert confirmed was allowed under the procedural rules. He instructed the President to pull the name of a country from a clear jar to begin the roll-call, starting with Saint Lucia and finishing with Rwanda.

The drumroll towards the vote was dramatic and a palpable sense of tension filled the air. Eyes scanned the floor, hushed voices filled the room. Delegates waved their arms to attract the attention of the President in the absence of a functional technical communication. After votes were tallied, confirming the adoption of the resolution, the President moved the plenary forward onto the next draft resolution and delegates fell in line. Despite the quick return to business, as delegates left the venue, some wondered if the vote had just opened Pandora's Box.

An earlier highlight of the day was the lunchtime Chinese food-tasting event, provided by the Wuhan Municipal People's Government, Hubei Province: instead of traveling to Wuhan, delegates enjoyed culinary specialties including hot dry noodles, duck, and dumplings, accompanied by special red and black teas prepared in a traditional tea ceremony. After the long and historic day, some delegates optimistically predicted that the final plenary session would be a short one.