

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands COP15

Highlights: Wednesday, 30 July 2025

COP15 Alternate President Tadeous Chifamba (Zimbabwe) welcomed delegates back after a day without COP meetings, which included a trip to the Kasibo Wetland Protection Project for some participants. The plenary worked its way through revised documents, adopting 13 resolutions by the end of the day.

Plenary

COP15 Alternate President Chifamba urged delegates to remain focused on technical aspects of wetland restoration, saying this was not the forum for settling territorial disputes or delving into issues of sovereignty. He then invited updates on draft resolutions.

In the afternoon, the US appeared for the first time and enumerated five “red line” objections on references to: climate change; diversity, equity, and inclusion; gender identity; the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals; and requests for financing in excess of 0% nominal growth budget. He said the US would not block consensus.

Consideration of Draft Resolutions

Updating Ramsar Information Sheets (RIS): Kenya reported on updates to RIS, lamenting an impasse on some text elements. She noted agreement on scientific and technical improvements and on making timely updates to the RIS, but concerns on mapping remained. She proposed drafting a resolution to establish a new contact group on updating RIS with new terms of reference to present to COP16; and, for the 67th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC) to consider options for enabling automatic data transfers from relevant sources and exploring ways to enhance RIS functionality. COP15 Alternate President Chifamba invited parties to focus on technical aspects. ALGERIA opposed, emphasizing that territoriality and mapping are fundamental.

JAPAN, IRAN, and Denmark, on behalf of the EU, and others, requested that the Secretariat’s Legal Advisor present the legal opinion on the listing process that might result in territorial disputes. The Legal Advisor opined: designation of the significance of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites) is a party-led process; the Secretariat has no mandate to review information provided by contracting parties in the RIS; providing geographical coordinates is not a key function of the UN Geospatial Network; and maps prepared by the UN serve only as a guide and reference.

PAKISTAN, supported by ALGERIA, MOROCCO, and CANADA, suggested adding a “without prejudice” clause to move forward without undermining territorial disputes. COP15 Alternate President Chifamba established a Friends of the Chair, encouraging “constructive ambiguity” to achieve compromise.

Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) 2025-2028: The Secretariat presented the document ([COP15.23.5 Rev.1](#)). CANADA requested clarity on additional opportunities for RRIs. Germany, on behalf of the EU, opposed the Secretariat liaising with regional representatives to the SC for additional

RRI opportunities, preferring instead that RRIs make the request. NEW ZEALAND supported reformulating the text to explore opportunities for new RRIs. After informal discussions during the lunch break, delegates agreed to recognize the ability of the SC to endorse areas intersessionally and to allow the Secretariat to liaise with regional representatives to the SC in parts of the world where there are currently no RRIs. The resolution was adopted as amended.

Communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness (CEPA): The Secretariat introduced the document ([COP15 Doc.23.6 Rev.1](#)), highlighting amendments on guidance for future CEPA scope, operations, and support for focal points. CANADA requested separating “Indigenous Peoples” and “local communities.” The resolution was adopted as amended.

Recruitment of the Secretary General: Denmark introduced the document ([COP15 Doc.23.8 Rev.1](#)), highlighting divergence on criteria for selecting the next Secretary General, with some supporting use of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) statutes and others preferring merit-based criteria. Sweden, on behalf of the EU, ZAMBIA, SEYCHELLES, and JAPAN, favored merit-based selection criterion, with gender and regional balance considered only when comparing equally qualified candidates. Brazil, on behalf of the AMERICAS, with UK, MEXICO, and IRAN, maintained that the original draft text centers on merit, but argued that the [IUCN statutes](#), previously agreed by parties, should be considered. The parties reached consensus through a Friends of the Chair meeting that the primary selection criterion would be based on merit, recognizing also the IUCN statutes. The resolution was adopted with amendments.

Institutional strengthening of the Convention on Wetlands: Kenya introduced the document ([COP15 Doc.23.9 Rev.1](#)), highlighting consensus against establishing a working group on resource mobilization and instead ensuring close linkages with the Subgroup on Finance. The Secretariat agreed on the value of the request to produce a study on resource mobilization from all sources, but expressed concern about capacity and expertise, suggesting surplus funds be used to carry out the task. After discussions on text related to follow-on actions for the SC, parties agreed to remove a subparagraph related to the Subgroup on Finance, noting it was duplicative of work in draft resolution 23.1 on financial and budgetary matters. The resolution was adopted as amended.

Future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention 2025-2028: New Zealand introduced the revised draft ([COP15 Doc.23.10.Rev.1](#)), highlighting a request for the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) to embed a knowledge translation component. CANADA, with ZAMBIA and AUSTRALIA, requested that knowledge translation be “subject to available resources.” On the 2025-2028 STRP work plan, delegates discussed and then agreed to a new formulation of “traditional and local knowledges taking into account, where appropriate, contributions of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.” On STRP work areas and proposed tasks 2025-2028, CHINA requested adding a new task to review new

technological and traditional knowledge. The resolution was adopted as amended.

Application of Criteria 6 and 9 to new and existing Ramsar Sites: New Zealand introduced the document ([COP15 Doc.3.12 Rev.1](#)). On the definition of a wetland “regularly” supporting waterbird populations, he explained replacing “normal” to “relevant” year so that the terminology was less restrictive. He noted preference to remove a requirement for remote sensing in the case of poor wetland information sources to allow flexibility and avoid locking contracting parties into specific approaches or methodologies. Belgium, for the EU, suggested avoiding specific reference to fixed taxonomies and to prevent inconsistency with other conventions or emerging global standards. She proposed using the “Wetlands International Waterbirds Populations Portal” as a source of information on waterbird taxonomy. The resolution was adopted with amendment.

Achieving equitable governance and effective conservation of wetlands as protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs): UK presented the document ([COP15 Doc.23.18 Rev.1](#)). CANADA, supported by AUSTRALIA, and Denmark, on behalf of the EU, preferred original language of the text to underscore the equal nature of Protected Areas (PAs) and OECMs.

ZAMBIA, BRAZIL, ESWATINI, CHILE, and VENEZUELA, opposed, emphasizing the need to differentiate between PAs and OECMs and to prioritize PAs, as their main objective is biodiversity conservation, whereas OECMs prioritize wetland management. BRAZIL, opposed by CANADA, suggested rewording to “complementary and as appropriate,” to align with the language of the Convention on Biological Diversity. A Friends of the Chair will resume work.

Strengthening action on culture and wetlands: Uganda presented the document ([COP15 Doc.23.14 Rev.1](#)), which was adopted without comments.

Restoration of degraded freshwater ecosystems to support ecological character, biodiversity, and ecosystem services: Gabon presented the document ([COP15 Doc.23.15 Rev.1](#)). Finland, on behalf of the EU, proposed including green and blue rivers in national policies and plans for water management. BRAZIL proposed replacing “local and traditional knowledge” with “traditional knowledge.” The resolution was adopted as amended.

Recognition of river dolphins and other inland wetland indicator species for the conservation and sustainable use of rivers: Colombia introduced the document ([COP15 Doc.23.21 Rev.1](#)), noting modification to add “indicator species,” enabling consideration of species other than dolphins to demonstrate the health of rivers and wetlands. The resolution was adopted with minor amendment.

Financial and budgetary matters: Germany, on behalf of the Finance Committee, presented the document ([COP15 Doc.23.1 Rev.1](#)). Noting lengthy and thorough deliberations, she described the Committee’s proposals: a 4.1% budget increase for the next triennium, of which 1.8% will be met by an effective increase of the core budget, 2.1% by the partial use of core budget surplus, and 0.2% by other sources of income, allowing the recruitment of one additional secretarial staff member. JAPAN called this a “historic decision” which shouldn’t be taken lightly given the difficult financial situations faced by many parties. The resolution was adopted.

Responsibilities, roles and composition of the SC and regional categorization of countries under the Convention on Wetlands: The Secretariat presented the document ([COP15 Doc.23.2 Rev.2](#)). On SC composition, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, on behalf of ASIA, supported by IRAN, JAPAN, and PAKISTAN, proposed adjusting the numerical thresholds regarding regional representation. Following clarification from the Secretariat that the issue will be addressed separately by the Management Working Group, the revised resolution was adopted as amended.

Promoting incorporation of new technology and traditional knowledge in wetland conservation, restoration, management and wise use: China introduced the document ([COP15 Doc.23.17 Rev.1](#)). In a paragraph referencing sharing of technology, science, and knowledge, BRAZIL opposed AUSTRALIA’s proposal to add “on a voluntary basis and mutually agreed terms,” while VENEZUELA and UK favored including free, prior and informed consent. Informal consultations will ensue.

Education and participation as a basis for the management of urban and peri-urban wetlands: Colombia introduced the resolution ([COP15 Doc.23.22 Rev.1](#)), highlighting additional focus on supporting local, including subnational and city, governments, and linkages with climate action. CANADA preferred recognizing the involvement of “rightsholders and partners” and to create citizen participation platforms that support consultation of “all rightsholders and stakeholders.” UK preferred “encouraging” rather than “urging” several actions and suggested removal of specific mention of climate instruments. The amended resolution was adopted.

Promoting sustainable lifestyles for the wise use of wetlands: India introduced the document ([COP15 Doc.23.20 Rev.1](#)), noting modifications including referring to and aligning with UN Environment Assembly Resolution 6.8, and removing proposals for resource mobilization, as the resolution’s aim is to support CEPA. The item was adopted without amendment.

Youth empowerment and integration: driving engagement in and the longevity of the Convention on Wetlands. Australia presented the document ([COP15 Doc.23.19 Rev.1](#)). Austria, on behalf of the EU, opposed the deletion of the youth professional programme. Informal consultations will ensue.

Extension of Resolution XIV.20: Delegates resumed discussion on the document ([COP15 Doc.23.26](#)). Delegates diverged on whether the resolution was solely of a technical nature, which was supported by Denmark, on behalf of the EU, CANADA, and others, or beyond the mandate of the Convention, supported by INDONESIA, VENEZUELA, and others. UKRAINE requested a roll-call vote, per Rule 39.1 of the Rules of Procedure (ROP). The Secretariat’s Legal Advisor presented the ROP for voting under Rules 39 and 44. Extensive debate continued on procedural issues, including the option for a secret ballot to be called “any time.” The Secretariat’s Legal Advisor opined that Ukraine’s first request for a roll-call vote takes precedence over a subsequent request for a secret ballot because requests are considered in the order they were received, an interpretation that was contested by BRAZIL, IRAN, PAKISTAN, and others. INDONESIA added that a secret ballot allows States to express votes without fear of consequences and reflects authentic sovereignty. The item will resume in plenary on Thursday.

In the Corridors

Tuesday provided a welcome respite as more than 200 delegates visited the Kasibo Wetland Protection Project. This seemed to rejuvenate parties as work quickly got under way in the morning, with many resolutions adopted before lunch. Outside the plenary, delegates were seen in focused talks to resolve final details, delaying the afternoon session by nearly half an hour. The time away from plenary was useful. “There is some very cool content in the STRP work plan and we are very close on OECMs,” said one veteran to the process.

However, the recitation of five “red lines” by the US was a jarring reminder of dynamic multilateralism. And unresolved discussions on the resolution by Ukraine left an unsettled feeling in the room. Several participants expressed concern on the eerie silence regarding the strategic plan, wondering what underlying issues continued to delay this essential item. “Will this meeting be blessed by the mist of Mosi-oa-Tunya?” We have one day left to find out.

The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of COP15 will be available on Monday, 4 August 2025 at enb.iisd.org/ramsar-convention-wetlands-cop15