

Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

Standing Committee Working Group on the Strategic Plan

Preparation of the 4th Strategic Plan of the Convention

for the period 2016 – 2021

Report of the first meeting

June 17 – 18, 2014

Working Group members attending the meeting: Burundi, Chile, Cuba, Finland, Indonesia, Iran, South Africa, Switzerland, United States of America. STRP Chair (via Skype).

Opening statements

1. Ms Maria Rivera, Senior Advisor for the Americas on behalf of the Secretary General, Mr Christopher Briggs welcomed the delegates to the first meeting of the Strategic Plan Working Group and noted that for the Secretary General this is a priority process and therefore the Secretariat is very committed to continue supporting the work of the consultant and the Contracting Parties on the preparation of the Strategic Plan. It was also highlighted the active role that the Contracting Parties are expected to play in this process as key players in the implementation of the Convention.
2. Ms Kristiina Niikonen, from Finland co-chair of the Working Group welcomed the participants and explained what has been done up to date.
3. Mr Peter Hilaire, Ramsar Secretariat consultant for the preparation of the Strategic Plan explained the agenda for the two days meeting which was subsequently agreed by the Working Group. The consultant noted that the main purpose of the meeting was to receive inputs from the Working Group that contribute to the ways forward on the preparation of the Strategic Plan in terms of key questions for the consultation process (e.g. structure, vision and mission, etc.). The agenda and the consultant's initial presentation made to the meeting (doc: notes for 17&18 June) is available on: http://www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-documents-strategicplansc47/main/ramsar/1-31-605_4000_0
4. The Working Group noted the importance of the participation of all members in the meetings of the group and indicated that mechanisms such as a report of the meetings, skype or feedback provided to members of the SPWG attending to other meetings could be used.
5. In terms of National Reports the Working Group noted that they are critical for the process and that is why the SC47 decided to move the date to 1st August. The Ramsar Secretariat sent a diplomatic note to all Administrative Authorities and the Working Group agreed that they would also send a reminder on the deadlines to each of their regions.
6. For next meetings the Working Group requested that documents should be sent well in advance in order to have enough time to go through them. The group also requested that there be

developed a matrix showing responses to the questionnaires by continent, as this may provide a better perspective on the different needs and priorities. The review of the Country Reports should include an estimation of achievement of the previous Strategic Plan (2009 – 2015).

7. Under the leadership of the Working Group Co chairs and guided by the consultant the Working Group discussed the progress on the consultation process. Likewise was discussed the scope, vision and mission, strategic goals, synergies and visibility, indicators, template and structure for the new Strategic Plan.

Main conclusions of the discussions of the Working Group

Ramsar Contracting Parties and Stakeholders consultation

8. The main messages from the questionnaire sent to Contracting Parties are detailed in the consultant's report available on the site indicated above. The two Key Messages that the consultant brought to the meeting were:
 - 1) The current Strategic Plan has a lot of understanding and credibility amongst the Parties. The structure and logic is understood, and is a useful guide for Parties' focal points. This quality should be preserved in the new SP.
 - 2) There are new issues, the world has changed in the last 15 years and Ramsar will need to engage with additional partners and sectors, and shift emphasis in order meet the challenges of the future. The new SP should reflect this shift. Key words to take account of in this regard include: Climate change; Sustainable Development Goals; Integrated Water Resources Management; Reversing degradation and restoration; guiding and advising; partnerships; demonstration; human well-being; policy research; indicators and measurable outcomes.
9. Regarding the consultation process with Ramsar stakeholders, a verbal commentary on the compilation of responses was made by the SRA for the Americas. It was agreed to continue to seek inputs from CMS, UNCC and water related conventions, IOPs, Regional Initiatives and CEPA focal points who have not provided their contributions by the established deadline. It was also highlighted the relevance of the participation of the Ramsar Secretariat in the Biodiversity Liaison Group meetings.

10. New Strategic Plan, key ideas

A wide ranging discussion then took place, and a number of points were put across. These include:

- The new Strategic Plan should tend towards simplicity.
- The current vision may be satisfactory also in the future. CEPA should be consulted on the question of the vision statement for the new SP.
- Ramsar is both a water and a biodiversity Convention. It has relevance to both aspects / dimensions and should be understood therefore on its own merits and not only insofar as it would contribute to other (water and / or biodiversity) objectives.

- The Strategic plan should consider not only how Ramsar contributes to the ambitions of water and biodiversity conventions, but also explore how these processes can contribute to Ramsar's ambitions, including wise use.
- The Sustainable Development Goals are evolving into the main global framework for sustainable development. The new Strategic Plan should take the emergence of this new framework into account. That said, the SDGs will not be agreed before September 2015, and the new SP preparation process should not make any assumptions about the final form or content of these.
- The new Strategic Plan needs to consider and integrate the relation between wetlands, water, wise use and key sectors such as agriculture, hydro-energy, mining and tourism. The importance of the private sector, as important actors in these sectors, needs also to be considered and integrated.
- New (or increasingly pressing issues) such as climate change, accelerating degradation of wetlands and aquatic resources need to be considered and integrated. It was noted that issues will be of varying concern to Parties and by region, and that, for example, climate change has a specific significance for small island states.
- The SP should consider how the promotion of basin, or catchment level approaches might favour the engagement of private actors in supporting the ambitions of the convention. It was also noted that private sector actors were in the forefront in matters of a green economy. The benefits for these actors of collaborating with Ramsar should be articulated.
- It was noted by the consultant that Ecosystem Services and valuations need to take account of both riparian benefits (to local populations) and of benefits to more remote people.
- Concerning time frames, the group discussed two aspects.
 - 1) The long-term ambitions of the convention as will be expressed in the vision and mission need not refer precisely to any time frame. The long-term vision should be aspirational and reflect sense of direction, a sense of intention and could relate to a 15 – 20 – 30 year horizon.
 - 2) The time-frame for the SP itself was also discussed. Two options were pointed to. A first option would have the duration of the SP be for 2 COP cycles, or 6 years (2015 – 2021). A second option would be to aim for 2020, thus aligning with Aichi and a (projected) 5th anniversary of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- In the short term we need a list of priority issues. We need to relate our goals also to the Aichi Targets but without missing the Ramsar "personality".
- The new Strategic Plan might be divided into two parts or papers: one part visionary, a shorter, more political paper with a clear message for the world-at-large, expressing aspirations and targets (with indicators), and a separate, more practical plan for the Parties' focal points, subsidiary bodies and IOPs, flexible and adaptable to regional and national contexts.
- Not sure the current goal 5 concerning increasing membership should retain current status. The emphasis could be on quality (of status, of management) rather than quantity (of sites and Parties).
- The building blocks of the common effort are activities and networks at national level. Regional and global networks should build on these.
- The concept of "enabling conditions" as used in both CMS and CBD SPs is possibly relevant for Ramsar as well. The DG's vision paper is about the Secretariat's engagement with enabling conditions (communications; capacity building; valuing wetlands; partnerships).

- Concerning the focus of the new SP, a range of views were expressed, from suggesting that the SP should stick strictly to the implementation of the convention, to suggesting that on the contrary, wise use and wetlands should be the focus.
- The SP should provide space for the anticipation of future changes (climate change; demographics possibly) likely to drive or mitigate current trends towards loss of wetland resources.
- The new SP should identify, insofar as possible, the entity (or entities working together) taking responsibility for any given activity, outcome, objective, or indeed Goal. The entities would include the Convention bodies, subsidiary bodies, the secretariat, regional initiatives, and international organisation partners.
- There are ways of working/reporting/drafting from other MEAs that we can consider for the development of the new SP. A number of suggestions were made referring the consultant to existing programme monitoring frameworks, existing programme formulations, from other related processes such as World Heritage, global forest discussions, water (UNECE).
- In principle, the SP will be the overarching reference (under the convention itself) for the work of the Convention (and entities working to implement the Convention). Other plans and strategies (STRP, CEPA, Resolutions) should be consistent with the SP and contribute to its accomplishment.
- The group was briefed by the Chair of the STRP on the Resolution XI.16 review process currently underway. The Resolution XI.16 review, being conducted by consultants Stephanie Mansourian and Veronica Lo, is looking at all aspects of scientific and technical advice, and the SP consultant noted that he has been in contact with Stephanie Mansourian. In discussing the relationship of the current SP with the STRP's work, the STRP Chair noted that the STRP's work plan is primarily driven by resolutions and available funding. Although the SP may inform the CPs when directing the STRP's work (through resolutions on tasks and budget), in the STRP Chair's opinion, the SP does not directly affect the day-to-day work of the STRP.
- Several aspects of the STRP's work this triennium may be useful to the development of the new SP. For example, the Secretariat has commissioned a draft Strategy for Engagement in the Global Water Debate, which is currently under review by the STRP (STRP Task No. 44). In addition, forthcoming STRP factsheets on status and trends of wetland extent; management effectiveness; convention implementation; and policy implementation may be relevant to the new SP. These factsheets will be incorporated into a State of the World Wetlands and their Services (SOWWS) report, which has the potential to be a "signature product" of the Convention.
- The SP and STRP work plans should be in line.
- There are ways of working/reporting/drafting from other MEAs that we can consider for the development of the new SP. Taking into account other strategies.
- Wise use is an overarching goal.
- Consider "what happens next" issues for after the approval of the SP.

3) Template and structure options for the Strategic Plan

The group took note of the ideas about SP structure presented by the consultant, based on the CBD and CMS templates. The following points were made:

- Notion of menu approach that has global, regional and national coherence. Some aspects for all at global level, allowing for regional differences, such as highlighting the importance of certain issues in certain regions.
- Thematic differences at regional level can be included in the preamble with clear understanding of the needs at country-region level.
- In terms of alignment, not so much as alignment but taking account of other processes while defining a clear role for Ramsar on its own.
- Through Country Report review process, identify those parts of current plan to keep, drop, amend, reinforce. In terms of indicators emanating from the country reports, consider and comment in priority on trends, before time-bound information (x new sites managed in x years).
- Indicators that are relevant at level of goals and strategies, at the regional level and at a ground level should be sought.
- Include CEPA role in communication.
- The Consultant and Secretariat will continue conversation between Strategic Plan and external partnerships (including private sector).
- Visibility discussion will inform various parts of the Strategic Plan. Two main ideas: 1. Visibility begins at home – that is to say that the first stage should be to affirm (at high and key levels) the identity, importance of Ramsar, wise use. Then the case for wetlands as essential components of basin level dynamics, as the nexus between water supply and use, the link between energy, transport, agriculture, disaster risk reduction, water quality are all aspects to be carried in the visibility effort.
- The SP should envisage first actions to take once approved, notably in respect of improving the visibility of Ramsar through high-level representations,
- Envisage next steps, which could include high-level expositions of the plan, Ramsar, the values of wetlands.
- The idea of a focus group on vision and on indicators was floated by the consultant. It was decided instead to engage with CEPA on the Vision statement, and to make individual suggestions to the consultant concerning indicators.

4) Timing and next steps

The Co-Chairs of the SPWG confirmed that a discussion of the 2nd draft of the new Strategic Plan will take place during the already scheduled Regional Consultations.

These take place:

Europe:	20 – 24 October 2014, Kufstein, Tyrol, Austria
Americas:	27 – 30 October 2014, Colombia
Asia:	3 – 7 November, Cambodia
Oceania:	10 – 12 November, Sydney, Australia
Africa:	17 – 21 November, Tunis, Tunisia

The first draft of the Strategic Plan will be ready for by 25 August. The paper will be sent to SPWG members who will in turn seek feedback from their regions in time for the 2nd meeting of the SPWG, 16 & 17 September 2014, in Gland.

A second draft will be produced after the 2nd meeting (September) of the Working group. This draft will be ready by 23rd of September. This document will then go into the Regional meetings being held in October and November 2014.

A 3rd draft will be tabled at the 3rd meeting of SPWG, 27.-28. November 2014 and a 4th and final draft should be ready by 20th of December, to go to SC 48.

The role of regional members of SPWG is to inform CPs and to submit drafts to the CP's of the region and require comments during the every draft rounds. Also members of SPWG are invited to have an appreciable role at the Regional Meetings.

The Consultant and the Secretariat will put together a methodology to be used consistently at the regional meetings for a review of the 2nd draft. This methodology, which might include a role for SPWG members in the presentation of the 2nd draft to the Regional meetings, will be discussed at the September 16 & 17 SPWG meeting.