

Ramsar COP14 Highlights: Monday, 7 November 2022

On the first day of Ramsar COP14 plenary sessions, contracting parties made good progress on the agenda items. Delegates addressed organizational matters, considered reports from Standing Committee (SC), Secretariat, and Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and began discussions on seven resolutions. The day concluded with the presentation of the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards.

Plenary

Organizational Matters: Mohamed Saif Al Afkham, COP 13 President, opened the 14th meeting of the Conference of Contracting Parties (COP14). Delegates then elected Li Chunliang, Deputy Administrator, National Forestry and Grassland Administration (NFGA) and Director General, Endangered Species Import and Export Management Office, China, as COP14 President and Wu Zhimin, Deputy Director General, Department for Wetland Management, NFGA, as Alternate President. Plenary elected Jacey Scott (Canada) as Vice President and rapporteur and Laura Bermudez Wilches (Colombia) as Vice President.

Delegates adopted the agenda (COP14 Doc.3.1) and provisional working programmes for the Wuhan meeting (COP14 Doc. 3.2.1), and the Geneva meeting with minor modifications (Doc. 3.2.2.Rev.1). SWEDEN withdrew its draft resolution on Convention documents and messages (COP14 Doc.18.7) and proposed discussion in an informal group. The Czech Republic, on behalf of the EUROPEAN UNION states present at the meeting, and opposed by RUSSIAN FEDERATION, condemned Russia's aggression towards Ukraine, expressing concern about harmful impacts of the military conflict on wetlands.

COP14 appointed the following parties to the Credentials Committee: Zambia, Indonesia, Panama, Armenia, and Fiji. Delegates approved the admission of observers of bodies or agencies that met the requirements of the rules of procedure (COP14 Doc.7) and established a Committee on Finance and Budget.

INDONESIA highlighted the launch of the Wuhan Declaration. Supported by BRAZIL and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, she disagreed with the legal officer's interpretation from the 59th meeting of the SC on the "principle of consensus," which indicated that the SC could vote on an issue, with the outcome to be decided by a simple majority. COP14 Alternate President Wu Zhimin, acting as President, asked the Secretariat to work with the legal advisor on the interpretation of consensus. IRAN stressed that the world, now more than ever, faces climate-related challenges that also threaten wetland ecosystems and, with BRAZIL, stressed ensuring adequate means for implementation, including collaboration, capacity building and technology transfer.

Reports

Report of the SC Chair: SC Chair Mohamed Al Afkham introduced the report (COP14 Doc.8) and thanked those involved in accomplishing the work.

Report of the Secretary-General on Global Implementation: Secretary General Musonda Mumba introduced the report on the global implementation of the Convention (COP14 Doc.9.1).

She reported that the 88% average national reporting rate for the Convention is the highest among four Conventions, according to a 2020 analysis by the Environmental Conventions Index and encouraged members to use the national report online tool and to strengthen synergies among multilateral environmental agreement (MEAs). IRAN stressed the importance of technology transfer and financial assistance for developing countries. COLOMBIA highlighted linking wetland restoration and peacebuilding processes.

Report on the Work of the Secretariat on the Convention Implementation: The Secretariat introduced the report (COP14 Doc.9.2). Highlights included the increasing relevance of wetlands and the Convention to global policy objectives on sustainable development and on enhancing efforts on the visibility of wetlands and the Convention.

List of Wetlands of International Importance: The Secretariat introduced the report (COP14 Doc.10 Rev.1), noting a lack of updated information on 75% of Ramsar Sites, including information on sites facing human threats on their ecological character. Other highlights included:

- the designation of 125 new Ramsar Sites;
- two new transboundary Ramsar Sites; and
- changes in the ecological character of Ramsar Sites due to human-induced activities.

MAURITIUS, supported by the UK, requested that discussions on the so-called "British Indian Ocean Territory" Site be delayed until COP15. SOUTH AFRICA commended parties for bringing the global coverage of Ramsar Sites to over 250 million hectares.

Report on CEPA Programme: The Secretariat reported on the Convention's communication, education, participation, capacity building and awareness (CEPA) Programme 2016-2024 (COP14 Doc.11). President Wu Zhimin, noted that recommendations from delegates will feed into the Ramsar Strategic Plan revision (COP14 Doc 18.10).

Report of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel Chair (STRP): Noting the disruptive impact of COVID-19 pandemic, STRP Chair Lei Guangchun, reported on the Panel's priorities, defined by the Standing Committee as blue carbon ecosystems, peatlands restoration and wetlands agriculture (COP14 Doc.12). CHINA congratulated the STRP for the updated data on wetlands in the Global Wetlands Outlook (2021) and urged the Panel to continue providing blue carbon ecosystems technical support.

Report on Administrative and Financial Implications of Draft Resolutions: The Secretariat presented the document (COP14 Doc.14) and cautioned that budgetary projections are best estimates, subject to change based on activities defined by parties.

Issues arising from Resolutions and Recommendations of Previous COP Meetings: The Secretariat noted that all relevant discussions are reflected in the current meeting's agenda and draft resolutions.

Resolutions

Financial and Budgetary Matters: SC Finance Subgroup Chair Mariana Olivera West (Mexico), presented the budget for the 2023-2025 triennium (COP14 Doc.15). She explained that the exceptional zero budget nominal increase in the report was due to low implementation of the budget in the previous triennium caused by the pandemic. COLOMBIA underscored the decision for a zero percent nominal increase. MEXICO appealed to all

parties to honor pledges, adding that adjustments to the budget should be reserved for exceptional circumstances. The President referred it to the Committee on Finance and Budget.

Responsibilities, Roles, and Composition of the SC and Regional Categorization of Countries: The Secretariat introduced the draft resolution (COP14 Doc.18.2), which outlines different tasks of the SC, and proposes meeting cycles of the SC and the COP. The CZECH REPUBLIC, on behalf of the EU, requested postponement of the first and second SC meetings to September 2023 and 2024, respectively. NEW ZEALAND requested the first SC meeting take place in June 2023. CANADA, supported by MEXICO, requested inclusion of SC criteria for approving or rejecting draft resolutions. BRAZIL asked for clarification on how the proposed criteria comply with the rules of procedure. The COP14 President noted that discussion on draft Resolution 18.2 would be taken up in informal discussions.

UKRAINE, on behalf of 28 countries, said, “These are not normal times,” referring to the environmental and wetland consequences related to “unprovoked and unjustified” aggression by Russia. COP14 President said the Bureau will decide on Tuesday whether a separate draft resolution related to Ukraine’s statement will be considered at COP14.

Effectiveness and Efficiency of the Convention: The UK presented the draft resolution (COP14 Doc.18.3), highlighting its purpose to provide a way forward for improving and updating the governance of the Convention. COLOMBIA stressed advancing new paths for intersessional work and urged that requirements for establishing new groups be interpreted as minimum standards.

SOUTH AFRICA expressed appreciation for the work to improve communication and encouraged the Secretariat to explore further the use of innovative technologies in enhancing communication among Parties. The COP14 President clarified that the role of the Secretariat should be to provide technical guidance or training, stressing they do not provide assistance in drafting of specific resolutions. Parties were asked to submit proposed amendments to the Secretariat and UK using track-changes.

Review of the fourth Strategic Plan and key elements for the fifth Strategic Plan: AUSTRALIA introduced the draft resolution (COP14 Doc.18.4). COLOMBIA, supported by BRAZIL and TUNISIA, underscored the importance of international cooperation for ensuring implementation. With UK and COSTA RICA, and opposed by IRAN, she supported wording that was gender-inclusive and moves beyond the gender binary.

BRAZIL proposed replacing a reference to “nature-based solutions” with “integrated approaches” so parties can implement the Strategic Plan in accordance with their own priorities, circumstances, and challenges. IRAN and INDONESIA suggested alternative wording, which included reference to “ecosystem-based approaches.”

The UK, COLOMBIA, CHINA, and NAMIBIA supported links to the CBD post-2020 global biodiversity framework. ARGENTINA asked to avoid reference to objectives yet to be negotiated. CHINA, supported by COSTA RICA, proposed referring to wetlands-based approaches for addressing water scarcity and encouraging innovative wetlands conservation actions in line with ambitions for transformative change. The COP14 President proposed a contact group, to be chaired by Australia.

Strengthening Ramsar Connections Through Youth: AUSTRALIA presented the draft (Doc.18.14) prepared with COSTA RICA. SWITZERLAND supported the proposal for a youth working group, but cautioned against appointing a youth advisor, and recommended relying on young professionals in the Secretariat as the bridge to youth. The UK suggested that any costs be considered with regard to resource availability. REPUBLIC OF KOREA suggested adding success stories of youth engagement. MALAYSIA proposed the appointment of youth ambassadors representing regions and stressed the need for technical and financial support to parties for effective implementation. COLOMBIA, supported by MEXICO, highlighted the importance of including youth from rural as well as urban areas. The PHILIPPINES said this resolution was a way to leverage the CEPA Programme. Malawi, on behalf of the AFRICA REGION, recalled that, by 2030, the number of

youth in Africa will have increased by 43%, and that youth will disproportionately experience the negative consequences of environmental degradation.

BRAZIL, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, and PERU supported the proposal. France, for the EU, requested a reference to pollution in the paragraph on intergenerational responsibility. NEPAL requested adding NGOs to the annexed list of roles for Convention National Youth Focal Points. The COP14 President invited proponents to engage informally and present a revised version.

Wetland Education in the Formal Education Sector: The draft resolution (COP14 Doc.18.13) was introduced by the REPUBLIC OF KOREA, with inputs from governments, subnational governments and Ramsar regional centers. AUSTRALIA, SRI LANKA, and CHINA supported the resolution. CANADA, supported by COLOMBIA, requested the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and non-formal and informal education throughout the text. GABON stressed the relevance of oral tradition in his culture. MALAYSIA recommended involvement of private organizations and establishing education networks for activities in Ramsar Sites. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA emphasized that the focus of the resolution is on formal education. COP14 President invited parties to consult and present a revised version.

Review of Ramsar Criteria, and delisting Ramsar Sites: ALGERIA presented the draft resolution (COP14 Doc.18.16). MOROCCO, PAKISTAN, MYANMAR, and others opposed the draft, saying the Convention should focus on the ecological criteria of Ramsar Sites, not their political status. The US, SENEGAL, and TOGO said delisting seems counter-productive to the aims of the Convention. NIGER, SENEGAL, and TOGO expressed frustration at the last-minute changes and proposed resubmitting it at the next COP. The CZECH REPUBLIC asked for clarification on which draft was being consulted.

The COP14 President adjourned the meeting, noting plenary will reconvene on Tuesday with input from the legal advisor.

Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards: Deputy Secretary General Jay Aldous presented the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards, in four categories:

- Young wetland champions: Fernanda Samuel, National Coordinator, Mangrove Protection and Restoration, Angola, for consistent and passionate efforts towards protecting and restoring mangrove wetlands;
- Wise use of wetlands: Masayuki Kurechi, Board Member, Ramsar Network Japan, for his long-term commitment to Asian-Australasian flyways and conservation of migratory birds;
- Wetland innovation: Carla Ximena Giraldo Malca, honoring contributions to the sustainability of the Pantanos de Villa wetland, Peru, by ensuring the voice of children as guardians of the wetland is recognized; and
- Merit award: Jérôme Bignon, President of the Association Ramsar France, for his dedicated and long-term contribution towards the conservation of wetlands in France by championing laws that improve the conservation of wetlands.

Each of the awardees received the Evian Special Prize of USD 10,000 provided by the Danone Group.

In the Corridors

Following the striking opening ceremony and high-level ministerial segment on Saturday and Sunday, the COP14 negotiations began in earnest on Monday. Parties made headway through the draft resolutions, although many garnered lengthy statements. With only one contact group established so far, it remains to be seen whether the President’s optimism on a quick resolution on the remaining drafts is warranted, but countries appear willing and committed to finding common ground. Straight after Plenary, some parties occupied canteen seats, keen to maintain momentum. As with previous years, the Ramsar Awards Ceremony, celebrating work on the ground, served as a reminder of the joint vision for wetland conservation, which the COP14 President underscored during his opening speech – our love for wetlands. Hopefully, that shared vision can carry delegates to successful outcomes over the coming week.