

Ramsar COP14 Highlights: Wednesday, 9 November 2022

Delegates made steady progress throughout the day, completing initial discussions on six of the remaining eight proposed resolutions. Parties heard updates from contact groups and informal groups working to reach agreement on draft resolutions. The first discussion on the proposed resolution relating to damages of Ramsar Sites in Ukraine was scheduled for Thursday morning.

Consideration of Draft Resolutions

Waterbird population estimates to support new and existing Ramsar Site designations: Australia presented the draft resolution (COP14 Doc.18.21). She highlighted a request to the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) to develop technical guidance for timely updating of waterbird population estimates, and the UK announced a CHF 5,000 contribution to fund the STRP-related work.

Many countries expressed support for the proposal. INDONESIA, MEXICO, Madagascar for the AFRICAN REGION, and many others welcomed the proposal, with TOGO and GUINEA-BISSAU highlighting the intent to provide much-needed capacity. RWANDA stressed funding technical capacity and COLOMBIA emphasized improvements on methodology.

NORWAY, supported by ZAMBIA, the PHILIPPINES, SIERRA LEONE, and Finland for the EU (with a reservation from SWEDEN), asked for several changes on processes for updating population estimates. On the importance of data, CHINA stressed its value for designating and evaluating ecological characteristics of Sites. On sources of information, TUNISIA noted reliance on volunteer organizations. JAPAN mentioned the Biodiversity Center of Japan Monitoring Sites 1000, a nationwide project for monitoring ecosystems and biodiversity in Japan, and SWEDEN proposed external researchers providing data for countries that lack capacity.

On the timing of updates, CHINA suggested updating data every 5 years. SENEGAL said their annual estimates occur in January, and THE GAMBIA lamented that the existing calendar creates a data gap because many migratory birds, such as flamingos, are not included in estimates when they arrive at other times of the year.

INDIA cited its 2020 national assessment of all bird species as a major step forward for meeting waterbird data requirements. ECUADOR proposed text to encourage specialized institutions to share their data on the portal. WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL endorsed NORWAY's proposal that Wetlands International review

information provided as the basis for a new 1% threshold for designation as an Internationally Important the Wetland (must regularly support 1% of the individuals in a biogeographic population of one species or subspecies of waterbird), and make the data available on the Waterbird Populations Portal.

Protection, management and restoration of wetlands as nature-based solutions (NbS) to address the climate crisis: Spain introduced the draft resolution (COP14 Doc.14.20 Rev.1), noting that it had been prepared with the involvement of 27 member countries of the Ramsar Regional Initiative (RRI) for the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet). Several parties, including CANADA, the US, ARGENTINA, Botswana on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, the PHILIPPINES, and CHILE suggested broadening the draft resolution beyond its current regional focus.

CANADA proposed amendments, including adding text on the role of Indigenous Peoples in wetlands conservation. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA, along with TURKEY and others, stressed the important role of wetlands in tackling climate change impacts, for instance through carbon sequestration and storage.

Ensuing debates centered on whether to focus on NbS, the ecosystem-based approach (EbA), or both. Several parties highlighted the recent UNEA 5.2 Resolution 5.5 providing a definition of the term NbS, and INDONESIA, the UK and others proposed related text. SWITZERLAND, the US, THAILAND, ARGENTINA, COLOMBIA, and others also preferred language on NbS. NEW ZEALAND, although expressing support for EbA, explained that reference to NbS would be the most effective in leveraging attention to wetlands within climate change action.

Several other countries, including ECUADOR and INDIA, opposed reference to NbS, preferring EbA. BRAZIL explained that the term NbS has prompted significant debate across environmental multilateral fora. He highlighted concerns from civil society on risks associated with the term, including greenwashing, and doubts as to whether NbS supports aims for tackling biodiversity loss. Noting outstanding, upcoming debates in other fora, he proposed delaying adoption of the resolution until the next COP. The UK opposed.

PARAGUAY, CAMBODIA, IRAN, the PHILIPPINES, COSTA RICA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, BOLIVIA, ZIMBABWE, THE GAMBIA, SENEGAL, and others noted that NbS and EbA are complementary and that both should be referred to in the resolution.

WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL, on behalf of several NGOs, suggested text on the need to mobilize private sector funding at

scale and speed, and for incentives that would lead to conservation and restoration.

The Secretariat will consolidate comments into a revised draft.

Updating the Wetland City Accreditation: The REPUBLIC OF KOREA introduced the draft resolution (COP14 Doc.18.12). Several countries, including BOTSWANA, SRI LANKA, INDONESIA, and the EU, with a reservation from SWEDEN, supported it. SWITZERLAND suggested linkages to the Trees in Cities Challenge, a global campaign to promote climate action in cities. Delegates suggested minor changes to the resolution, including AUSTRIA and SWEDEN on a normalized timeline, SOUTH AFRICA on outlining the benefits of accreditation, and the US on consistency and transparency of the process. INDIA suggested a new category for cities that meet half of the criteria. AUSTRIA and SWEDEN will engage in informal consultations on the timeline.

Establishment of the International Mangrove Center: CHINA introduced the proposed resolution (COP14 Doc.18.22. Rev.1) and alerted delegates that many parties were working on an earlier version of the draft resolution. He outlined various elements of the proposed center including: an intent to create an action-oriented technical-support platform for international exchange and cooperation that promotes implementation of the Convention; no financial implications for the Secretariat; and an international steering committee working alongside interested contracting parties to define the mission, mandate, terms of reference, operations, and budget.

Many parties supported the proposal, including CAMBODIA, MADAGASCAR, TANZANIA, LIBERIA, THE GAMBIA, IRAN, PAKISTAN, ESWATINI, SOUTH AFRICA, and CAMEROON, citing its value for collaboration, technical exchange, and mutualized learning. VENEZUELA, BANGLADESH, COLOMBIA, KENYA, and DOMINICAN REPUBLIC saw its value as a mechanism to stimulate regional and local exchanges and to promote harmonization among existing regional initiatives.

ECUADOR requested more time to review the amended draft and BRAZIL called for amendments to link the center's work to sustainable livelihoods, poverty eradication, and the Agenda 2030.

JAPAN, the UK, the US, INDONESIA, INDIA, COSTA RICA, and France, on behalf of the EU, expressed concerns on a range of issues, including: questions on the value-added of the center; its relationship with the Ramsar Convention and mandate; and its legal, administrative and governance arrangements. JAPAN noted the draft resolution requests technical support from the Secretariat, saying it would impact the Convention's core funding, and asked whether the center would operate under Swiss or Chinese law, and whether the COP would have oversight responsibilities. A contact group was established to explore options for agreement.

Status of Sites in the List of Wetlands of International Importance: The Secretariat introduced the draft resolution (COP14 Doc.18.15). THAILAND asked the Secretariat to explore and provide guidance and support for parties to overcome obstacles related to submitting updated information on their Ramsar Sites. Czechia, on behalf of the EU, with a reservation from SWEDEN, proposed amendments for simplifying and streamlining the reporting process to make it less burdensome for parties. SWEDEN noted concern for impacts on the budget and proposed decreasing reporting.

Regarding the Secretariat providing technical support to parties facing threats to their Sites, ECUADOR asked to prioritize the most vulnerable Sites as opposed to the oldest. BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL, on behalf of a number of NGOs, proposed that Ramsar Sites include information on entire ecosystems of importance to migratory waterbirds and other dependent species and to revise boundaries accordingly. The UK requested its inclusion.

Integrating wetland conservation and restoration into national sustainable development strategy: China introduced the draft resolution (COP14 Doc.18.19). The UK proposed additional text for ensuring alignment with national strategies and action plans under the UNFCCC and CBD. Slovakia, for the EU, with reservations from SWEDEN, asked to retain text on NbS.

SOUTH AFRICA called for enabling conditions to roll out national strategies through capacity-building programmes. LESOTHO highlighted the need to identify capacity gaps to address constraints in wetland conservation and restoration. BRAZIL suggested text noting deep concern that many wetland-dependent communities face extreme poverty and food insecurity, strengthening the case for wetland conservation. Supported by ECUADOR, he suggested removing mention of NbS, pending outstanding discussions in the other draft resolution. IRAN and INDONESIA called for including both NbS and EbA.

CANADA called for including monitoring of wetland conservation and restoration based on appropriate performance indicators and ensuring regular progress reporting.

NEW ZEALAND proposed a new paragraph explaining that sustainable development under the Convention includes maintaining and enhancing the ecological character of wetlands. The PHILIPPINES asked for clarification on "minimizing conversion of wetlands" and suggested the use of environmental impact assessments to avoid or minimize the impacts of development. The Secretariat will continue informal consultations.

In the Corridors

"Unless it is life or death issues, we should compromise because we are the Ramsar family. We want solutions, instead of talking and talking." — Wu Zhimin, COP14 President

Throughout Wednesday, the COP14 President felt the need to draw people back into a collegial and bargaining spirit, following numerous and lengthy statements by parties on two specific resolutions—one on nature-based solutions, and the other on a proposal to establish an international mangrove center. Whether he got through to them remains to be seen; contact groups and informal consultations kept people busy in-between plenary sessions and again into the evening. Parties have yet to hear whether consensus has been reached on any draft resolutions.

As delegates and observers pondered the fate of outstanding texts in the four contact groups, some speculated that the draft resolution on de-listing Ramsar Sites in disputed territories seemed most at risk of being deferred to the next COP. Encouraging progress was rumored to have been made on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives resolution, and the apparent convergence on Option 1 in the "defunct resolutions" text suggests delegates may have found a path forward for reaching consensus on a complex process. There may only be two draft resolutions yet to be introduced, but one seasoned delegate suggested that the light at the end of the tunnel is not as close as it may appear.