

Terms of Reference for the Ramsar Culture Network

(Adopted through Decision SC57-27 in June 2019, published as Annex 3 of SC57 Doc.20 Rev.1)

Context

1. The Ramsar Culture Network (RCN) is the successor to the Convention's Culture Working Group which was established under Resolution IX.21 in 2005.
2. From 2011 to 2018 the RCN functioned by a mixture of voluntary efforts, project funding from the MAVA Foundation and match-funding from other sources, and it worked in cooperation with the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. The Network's activities have been managed by a small coordination team linked to/employed by the Ramsar Secretariat and reporting to the Convention's Standing Committee.
3. In Resolution XIII.15 (2018) the Parties invited the Network to continue its work, subject to the availability of resources; and established a process for formalising the present Terms of Reference by decision of the Standing Committee, based on a proposal from the Scientific and Technical Review Panel, working with interested Contracting Parties.
4. The Terms of Reference below set out the composition, purposes and principal operating methods of the RCN. The Annex illustrates a simple indicative Action Plan for the triennium, which will be reviewed annually.
5. In the event of any conflict between these Terms of Reference and the provisions of any Resolution adopted by the Conference of Parties, the latter shall take precedence.

Composition of the Network

6. The RCN is a volunteer community of practice. Membership is open to anyone with an interest and willingness to engage in the subject of culture¹ (including local communities and indigenous peoples issues) in relation to wetlands. Membership may be generally promoted and certain individuals may from time to time be encouraged to consider joining, but there is no qualification or vetting process. Intending members join by simply requesting to be added to the mailing list (by writing to culture@ramsar.org). In response they are provided with a short briefing pack explaining the minimum expectations of membership (see below) and if they then confirm their willingness to join on these terms they are added to the list; and are asked to provide contact details, General Data Protection Regulations consent and some basic information about their field(s) of expertise and interests.
7. The general promotion of the Network, and occasional encouragement of individuals to join, as mentioned above, will be done having regard to a desire for the RCN membership to reflect the

¹ Definitions of "culture" depend on the context. Article I of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity notes that "culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature (...)." In a number of Ramsar contexts, "culture" has been informally interpreted as a property of human groups or societies which expresses aspects of their identity, shared values, attitudes, beliefs, knowledge systems, creativity and other practices. It conditions the ways in which people interact with each other and with their environment. Culture can be exhibited in both material and non-material ways, and it is constantly evolving.

diversity of the Ramsar stakeholder community at large, in terms *inter alia* of regional balance, gender, age profile, languages, and the participation of local communities and indigenous peoples.

8. Participation in the Network is open to representatives of Contracting Party governments, intergovernmental agencies, local communities, indigenous peoples, other organisations and networks, as well as individuals acting in a private capacity. Members wishing to participate in a representative capacity must indicate this clearly on joining, and they must have authority to do so from the group they represent.

Purposes

9. The overall purpose of the Ramsar Culture Network is to bring together and create synergy among individuals, groups and organisations who can contribute to the conservation and wise use of wetlands in ways which integrate cultural and natural aspects, and thereby achieve greater effectiveness in the implementation of the Ramsar Convention.
10. The overall purpose as stated above will be achieved by (*inter alia*):
 - (a) nurturing a global community of organisations and individuals who are active in recognising, safeguarding and promoting the cultural values of wetlands and the role these values play in supporting the conservation and wise use of wetlands;
 - (b) compiling, sharing and disseminating useful knowledge, including lessons learnt (and related tools), concerning the interactions between culture and wetlands;
 - (c) guiding and supporting Contracting Parties in the implementation of relevant Resolutions of the Conference of Parties;
 - (d) encouraging and contributing to international policy and guidance on the interactions between culture and wetlands;
 - (e) developing greater worldwide capacity and improved partnerships for the effective integration of cultural aspects in the conservation and wise use of wetlands;
 - (f) fostering efficient synergies and mutually enhanced impact between the Ramsar Convention's culture-related activities, its scientific & technical activities and its activities in the area of communication, education, participation and awareness (CEPA); and
 - (g) encouraging normative alignment with international principles regarding cultural diversity, human rights and the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities as expressed in international law, related Multilateral Environmental Agreements and the United Nations system.

Principal operating methods

11. For the most part, the Ramsar Culture Network operates as a self-organising community of volunteers, with a spectrum of different levels of engagement according to need and context. In some cases, this may take the form of a leading or contributing role in a specific activity that has been approved within one of the Ramsar Convention's programmes, and in some cases relevant work may be undertaken in the course of a member's existing professional position. A

minimum expectation is that anything done within the RCN context is done in a spirit of collaboration.

12. Typical contributions may include:
 - leading a project;
 - contributing to projects, proposals and publications;
 - responding to consultations;
 - leading or participating in a RCN Thematic Group (see below);
 - contributing data, case studies, cultural inventories, and other documentation or research;
 - supporting attention by Ramsar Contracting Parties to cultural aspects in their formal documentation and other processes under the Convention, including Ramsar Information Sheets, National Reports to COPs, National Wetland Policies and National Wetland Committees; and
 - championing the Ramsar Convention and its culture & wetlands agenda in the members' own contexts, including support for the development of strengthened collaborations and partnerships.
13. In addition, from time to time, "centrally coordinated" initiatives maybe undertaken in the name of the RCN as a whole, subject to oversight by the supervision and coordination arrangements referred to below. Such initiatives may involve (but will not necessarily be limited to) development and implementation of project proposals, development and submission of funding bids, and development and dissemination of communication products.
14. Overall supervision of the Network will be provided by the Ramsar Standing Committee. The Committee will receive from the RCN Coordinator (see below) a report on the activities of the Network at each of the ordinary meetings of the Committee. The Committee will be invited to identify a principal point of contact from within the Committee's membership to liaise as necessary with the Network/the Coordinator at other times.
15. The Network will, through the Coordinator, also report on its activities at intervals of not less than every six months to a nominated staff contact point in the Ramsar Secretariat.
16. Given the links between the activities of the RCN and certain of the tasks assigned by the COP to the Convention's Scientific & Technical Review Panel, the Panel will be invited to identify an individual from within its membership to act as a principal point of contact with the Network. The Network will seek to assist STRP on tasks and issues of mutual relevance.
17. The Network may undertake certain of its activities through self-selecting and self-organising sub-sets of the membership which are clustered into "Thematic Groups" or groups formed on a geographical basis². Each Group of this kind should nominate a lead individual, and may also nominate co-leads and/or other office-bearers (e.g. a secretary) as required. Any such Group should (through the overall coordination arrangements) keep the Network as a whole informed about its work, and should take active steps to avoid conflict, confusion or duplication of effort with other Groups and with the RCN overall.

² At present (although this is likely to be updated) the RCN acknowledges five Thematic Groups, with widely varying levels of activity and engagement, on (i) bio-cultural diversity, (ii) agriculture & food heritage, (iii) tourism, (iv) arts and (v) youth engagement. These themes are not set in stone and the groups may be changed, wound up or others may be added, according to evolving levels of interest within the RCN. One geographically-based group also currently exists, namely the MedWet Culture Network, operating under the MedWet Ramsar Regional Initiative. The planning and coordination of this group is also aligned with that of the RCN.

18. Overall coordination of the Network will be provided by an identified Coordinator. Until such time as alternative arrangements for this are determined by the Secretariat or the Standing Committee, and/or by the terms of any funding agreement secured for the purpose of supporting activities of the Network, the existing coordination arrangements which have operated since April 2018 will continue on an interim informal basis.
19. These interim informal arrangements include the continuation on a voluntary basis of the role undertaken by the individual Coordinator appointed for the preceding MAVA-funded project, supported by a core group of members of the Network. The core group has a fluid composition according to availability and need, but seeks to achieve a regional and gender balance, and it includes individuals from, *inter alia*: Slovenia among Contracting Party governments, WWF among the Ramsar International Organisation Partners, UNESCO, ICOMOS-NL, Med-INA and WLI among collaborating organisations, plus the leads of the RCN Thematic Groups. Liaison with the Ramsar Secretariat is maintained throughout.
20. The intention, as soon as practicable and in line with the mandate in Resolution XIII.15, is to replace these interim arrangements with a more robust mechanism, by seeking external funding support for delivery of practical activities by the Network. A portion of this support would be used to enable the necessary coordination. A process of selection and appointment of (a) relevant individual(s) to undertake coordination/secretarial functions would be established within the terms of the funding agreement concerned.
21. For practical reasons, much of the RCN coordination, at least at the outset, is likely to continue to be conducted in English. It is nonetheless a firm aspiration, subject to the availability of resources, to manage communications ultimately in all of the Ramsar languages. It is hoped that translation services may be a prime candidate for attracting co-funding or support in kind. Where circumstances allow, languages beyond the Convention's official three will also be used. Within the Ramsar Culture Network itself, of course, local activities and materials may be developed in any language.
22. Members of the Ramsar Culture Network are not authorised to speak on behalf of the Convention or any of its official bodies, unless specifically instructed to do so or unless otherwise provided by the terms of a specific contract or project agreement. Any wish to speak on behalf of the Network as a whole should be cleared in advance with the Coordinator; and any wish to speak on behalf of a sub-group should be cleared in advance with the leader of that sub-group. Similarly, the use of the Ramsar logo and other branding devices is subject to formal restrictions, and any such use (apart from general consents for use of e.g. World Wetlands Day materials) should normally be cleared in advance by agreement with the Secretariat³.

³ Network members were issued with "Guidelines on the use of the Ramsar and RCN identities" as an annex to the RCN Action Plan in 2016. Some of the specifics in that document now need updating, and it may be worthwhile to produce a revised version; but the key principles remain relevant.

Appendix: Indicative activity areas 2019-2021

Key priority areas of intended activity for the RCN will be elaborated in a separate Action Plan for the triennium, indicating strategic objectives served, priorities, timeframes, lead responsibilities, deliverables, resources required/allocated, etc. The Action Plan is not subject to formal approval, but it will be shared with the Secretariat, Standing Committee, STRP and others for information. It will be reviewed on an annual basis.

An indicative list of key areas of activity is given below, for illustrative purposes.

Activity	Notes
Membership	
1. Re-launch a call for expressions of interest in membership; refresh the membership list; re-confirm the makeup of the Thematic Groups; send out “fresh start” documentation to the updated list, etc.	As soon as ToRs are agreed.
2. Maintain the Network membership database; and maintain administrative communications with members.	Essential coordination function (coordination overall requires funding).
Co-ordination	
3. Put the RCN coordination capacity on a sound and sustainable footing (see paras 18-20 of the present ToR document above).	Key priority; linked to agreement of ToR.
Project development	
4. Develop at least one international flagship project proposal for submission to (a) potential funder(s).	Requires dedicated effort and likely resourcing for staff time, but could be the key to making other activities feasible.
5. Prepare an approach for an analysis of culture-related content in the Ramsar Contracting Party national reports to COP14.	For 2020.
Work-plan development	
6. Review all Resolutions emerging from COP13 for any operative elements concerning culture-related actions, and produce a synthesis of these (a) overall and (b) specifically for those falling within the ambit of the STRP’s work programme.	For 1 st half of 2019, to feed STRP work programming. Requires time but little or no resourcing.
Support for Convention processes	
7. Further promote the undertaking of Rapid Cultural Inventories for Wetlands. Assist Parties in compiling relevant sections of their Ramsar Information Sheets (cultural values; cultural ecosystem services) for new Ramsar Sites and for the regular updating of existing sites. Maintain an overview of the resulting datasets, including undertaking analyses where possible of completeness, trends, etc.	Likely priority core of project proposal mentioned above.
8. Review the 2016 guidance on Rapid Cultural Inventories for Wetlands, and assist the STRP in considering whether any revision/update of this guidance is necessary. (This activity arises from a specific request in Resolution XIII.15, para 19).	To integrate in STRP programme.
9. Revive and take forward the extensive work undertaken in the previous triennium concerning the reviews of Resolutions VI.8,	Partly completed; but needs CP engagement.

Activity	Notes
VIII.19 and IX.21; and consider possible proposals arising from this to be developed for COP14.	
10. Host an event at Ramsar COP14 for sharing knowledge & experience and for supporting advisory input to relevant decisions of the COP.	Funding dependent.
Support for Parties	
11. Support Parties with culture-related elements of Ramsar Site management effectiveness assessments (Resolution XII.15).	Opportunistic and/or project-dependent
12. Support Parties with culture-related elements of rapid assessments of wetland ecosystem services (Resolution XIII.17).	Opportunistic and/or project-dependent
13. Support Parties with synergistic management of cultural values at sites with multiple international designations (e.g. Ramsar and World Heritage).	Opportunistic and/or project-dependent
14. Produce regional “Learning from experience” study reports in collaboration with Contracting Parties.	Funding dependent.
15. Host webinars/workshops on culture related aspects of wetland conservation and wise use (e.g. Rapid Cultural Inventories; thematic group highlights, “learning from experience” studies, etc.).	Workshops are funding dependent; webinars might be done through in-kind support.
Reporting and communication	
16. Report on activities to the Standing Committee, STRP and Secretariat.	Essential coordination function (coordination overall requires funding).
17. Produce and disseminate a periodic RCN newsletter.	Coordination function (coordination overall requires funding).
18. Update, revitalise and improve access to a repository of relevant reports, images and other materials on the internet.	Essential coordination function (coordination overall requires funding).
19. Generate news items and other communication materials for the Ramsar website and other relevant outlets.	Coordination function (coordination overall requires funding).
20. In consultation with the Secretariat and STRP, develop an [annual] infographic concept on culture and wetlands capable of development by the Secretariat and dissemination via social media.	
21. Engage in “nature culture journey” initiatives by IUCN, UNESCO, CBD et al., in the context inter alia of the evolution of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.	Partly funding dependent.
22. Participate in relevant conferences (e.g. in 2019, the “Water as Heritage” conference co-hosted by ICOMOS-NL and partners, Taiwan, May 2019, and the UNESCO Global Network of Water Museums conference, Valencia, June 2019).	Partly funding dependent.
23. Establish agreed modalities for programmatic-level collaboration with the MedWet Culture Network.	No resourcing required.