

Governance, planning and funding of activities on culture and wetlands in the framework of the Ramsar Convention

Action requested. The Standing Committee is invited to discuss the implementation of its previous decisions on culture and wetlands as reported in this paper, and to **endorse** the improved approach now proposed for taking forward this area of work in future.

Note from the Secretariat: This document is presented as received from the coordinators of the Ramsar Culture Working Group, who have prepared it in consultation with the Secretariat.

Introduction and background

1. The cultural values of wetlands are mentioned in paragraph 3 of the Preamble of the Ramsar Convention, evidence of their importance since the early days of the Convention.
2. Specific actions on incorporating culture in the work of the Convention, however, were addressed officially much later through the following Resolutions of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP):
 - VIII.19: *Guiding principles for taking into account the cultural values of wetlands for the effective management of sites* (Valencia, Spain, November 2002).
 - IX.21: *Taking into account the cultural values of wetlands* (Kampala, Uganda, November 2005).
3. A Ramsar Culture Working Group (CWG) was requested by Resolution IX.21 and established by the Secretary General, consisting of regional representatives and of certain experts. Thymio Papayannis was appointed first as Secretary of the Working Group (chaired by the Secretary General) and then as Coordinator. The Standing Committee endorsed continuation of the Working Group's efforts in its decisions SC35-1 (2007) and SC36-3 (2008).
4. A Ramsar guidance document on Culture and Wetlands, prepared by the CWG, was presented during COP10 (Changwon, Republic of Korea, October-November 2008) and was widely disseminated in the three official languages of the Convention.
5. For the International Symposium on Water and Wetlands, held in Agadir, Morocco, in February 2012, the CWG organised with UNESCO's World Heritage Centre (WHC) a thematic session on the cultural services and values of wetlands.
6. In July 2012 in Bucharest, during a special event held in the framework of Ramsar COP11 that was organised by the CWG with the support of the Mediterranean Institute for

Nature and Anthropos (Med-INA), a draft of an Action Plan on Culture and Wetlands was presented and debated.

7. The majority of work on this subject has been resourced through a combination of volunteer time and external project funding for short-term activities, notably from the MAVA Foundation. There is no allocation in the Ramsar core budget for activities on culture and wetlands.

The Culture Working Group – Overview

8. Resolution IX.21 requested the Ramsar Secretariat “to establish a multi-disciplinary working group on the cultural values of wetlands, with a balanced geographic representation, under the supervision of Standing Committee, with appropriate input from the STRP, to coordinate the activities described [in the Resolution]”.
9. The Standing Committee at its 36th meeting in February 2008 adopted decision SC36-3 in which it “confirmed that the work of the Culture Working Group should continue in future, after COP10, in order to help inform the operations of the Parties in implementing the Convention and in helping the STRP to focus on issues that require a cultural perspective and understanding”.
10. After COP10, the membership of the CWG consisted of five regional representatives, plus two representatives from UNESCO and two experts (Thymio Papayannis, as Coordinator, and Dave Pritchard).
11. From the Ramsar Secretariat, mainly the Senior Regional Advisor for Europe (Tobias Salathé) became involved in the activities of the CWG.
12. Some of the activities of the Ramsar CWG have been supported financially by the MAVA Foundation for Nature. For the period leading to COP10 this consisted of an amount of 18 000 EUR, and for activities in 2012, including those associated with COP11, a sum of 167 000 EUR was secured (contractually administered through the Ramsar Secretariat). For future funding see paragraph 30 below.
13. Most of the activities of the Ramsar CWG have been carried out up to now by a small group of dedicated individuals mainly on a voluntary basis. These include:
 - Kerstin Manz, UNESCO World Heritage Centre
 - Thymio Papayannis, CWG Coordinator
 - Dave Pritchard, STRP expert and consultant to the Convention
 - Tobias Salathé, Ramsar Senior Regional Advisor for Europe
14. Of the five regional representatives, only the representative from Asia has participated actively in the work of the CWG.
15. The Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos (Med-INA) has acted in various instances as the secretariat of the CWG, assisting with administrative, technical and communication tasks.

16. Other collaborations have been developed especially with:

- The World Heritage Centre
- The MedWet Initiative
- Wetlands International – Japan

Collaborations could have been broader as interest has been shown from various additional quarters, but the limiting factor was the capacity of the CWG to develop those opportunities further.

A proposed Ramsar Culture Network (RCN)

17. An overall revitalisation of the CWG is now proposed, with some adjustments to its structure, governance and operation. A key component of this is the re-casting of the “Working Group” construct as a wider “Ramsar Culture Network” (RCN). Its proposed mission is as follows: “To bring together and create synergy among organisations and individuals that can contribute to an approach to the conservation and wise use of wetlands which integrates cultural and natural aspects, and thereby achieves greater effectiveness in the implementation of the Ramsar Convention”.
18. It is proposed that members of the Network can be Ramsar Contracting Parties, intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations and individual experts who are committed to the mission stated above, and who are willing to contribute to its implementation in the framework of the Ramsar Convention and relevant action plans elaborated for this purpose.
19. Membership would be confirmed by decision of the Steering Group (see below) under the supervision of the Ramsar Secretary General, following either a) an offer by an intending member to participate or b) a proposal (with the nominee’s consent) from an existing member. This implies acceptance by each member of the *modus operandi* described below.
20. The RCN will be managed by a Steering Group appointed by the Ramsar Secretary General.
21. Members of the RCN will be kept informed of all activities concerning culture and wetlands in the framework of the Convention; they in return undertake to provide information on relevant matters. Members will be expected to contribute to RCN activities as appropriate and as capacity allows.
22. Communications within the Network will normally be carried out through electronic mail and through the use of Skype. They will be supplemented by information posted on the existing section of the Ramsar website (under “Activities/Culture and Wetlands/Ramsar Culture Network”).

The Culture Steering Group (CSG)

23. The function of the CSG will primarily be to secure the implementation of a proposed Action Plan on the Ramsar Convention and Culture (initially covering the period 2013-

2016), by mobilising the Ramsar Culture Network, helping to find the necessary resources, and managing or overseeing the agreed activities.

24. The members of the CSG would be appointed by the Ramsar Secretary General. The following are currently proposed:
 - Sansanee Choowaew, Mahidol University, Ramsar Award Laureate 2008
 - Kerstin Manz, UNESCO World Heritage Centre
 - Thymio Papayannis, CWG Coordinator, Ramsar Award Laureate 2012
 - Dave Pritchard, Ramsar consultant, STRP expert, Ramsar Award Laureate 2008
 - Tobias Salathé, Ramsar Senior Regional Advisor for Europe
25. The Coordinator of the CSG should also be appointed by the Ramsar Secretary General. For the period 2013-2016 a joint Coordination by Thymio Papayannis and Dave Pritchard is proposed. The Joint Coordinators will assign tasks between them by agreement. Their major task will be the mobilisation of all members of the Steering Group so that a democratic and efficient operation of the Group is ensured, and thereby an effective operation of the Network.
26. Administration of finances for the operation of the CSG will be supported by the Ramsar Secretariat, continuing the approach which has been followed in 2012, except where any alternative approach is separately agreed between the Secretary General and the Joint Coordinators. As there is no provision for cultural activities in the Ramsar core budget, appropriate opportunities for joint fundraising should be identified, building on the successes achieved already in this respect in recent years.
27. All other administrative services for the operation of the CSG will be provided by Med-INA, as specified in an appropriate MoU between the Ramsar Secretariat and Med-INA.

Short-term steps to activate these arrangements

28. The arrangements included in this document are submitted to the consideration of the Ramsar Standing Committee for review and endorsement.
30. A funding proposal, based on the Culture Action Plan, will be submitted to the MAVA Foundation in early 2013 for a four-year period (2013-2016). Counterpart funding will be sought by the CSG from other foundations, interested Contracting Parties, and other relevant sources.
31. An “Action Plan for the Ramsar Convention and Culture 2013-2016” has been prepared to guide all the activities of the RCN. A consultation process on this Action Plan was undertaken during 2012, and contributions received have been taken fully into account.
32. The text of the Action Plan is being translated and will be made available in the three Ramsar languages on the Convention’s website. A version in printed form and DVD will be prepared and distributed to specifically relevant institutions and individuals as required.
33. The implementation of the Action Plan will be the main responsibility of the Culture Steering Group. As a first step, priority activities will be selected, determined by reference

to general Convention implementation priorities agreed by the COP (including the Ramsar Strategic Plan and relevant COP Resolutions) and by the availability of funding. In addition, the Culture Steering Group will assist the Ramsar Secretariat, Standing Committee members, and other Parties on relevant aspects of the process of developing an updated Strategic Plan for the Convention for the post-2015 period.

34. By the time of the Standing Committee's 46th meeting, a work plan for 2013 will have been developed, in order to guide the priorities and detailed activities for the first year of the revised working approach. This will form the basis of a funding proposal to be submitted to the MAVVA Foundation in early 2013. If the response from MAVVA is negative, the Steering Group will continue working to the extent possible on a voluntary basis, as in the past, and on a reduced programme, while alternative funding sources are explored as a matter of urgency.
35. The Standing Committee is invited to discuss the progress reported above in implementing its previous decisions on culture and wetlands, and to **endorse** the improved approach now proposed for taking forward this area of work in future.