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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: AOB for the meeting of the Council (Environment) on 21 October 2025
15th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention
on Wetlands (Ramsar COP 15)
(Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, 23-31 July 2025)
- Information from the Presidency

The 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands took place from 23 to 31 November in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

The most important decision at COP15 was the adoption of the 5th Strategic Plan of the Convention on Wetlands 2025-2034. The process leading up to the adoption of the resolution is the outcome of two years of hard work by the Working Group, reflecting the principles of the Convention. It addresses the environmental, social and economic aspects of wetland management on a global scale. The strategy was adopted, but was not particularly ambitious. In the next nine-year period, there is only an ambition to increase the number and scope of Ramsar sites – meaning that Ramsar's member countries will have essentially achieved the strategic plan's goal if just one new Ramsar site is established anywhere in the world.

An additional crucial resolution from the conference was the agreement to increase the budget by 4.1%, consisting of a 1.8% increase in member countries' contributions and the rest from unspent funds. Prior to the conference, there were concerns that the United States would withdraw from the convention, leaving a significant gap in Ramsar's budget. This did not happen; on the other hand, Russia withdrew from the convention, while Saudi Arabia joined it.

On the last day of the conference, the extension of the Ukraine resolution from the last COP in 2022 was adopted, with almost as large a majority as at COP14, right after Russia's invasion. The resolution draws attention to the threat and devastation of a number of wetlands of international importance in Ukraine as a result of Russian military aggression. It was decided at COP that the voting would be secret, unlike at COP14, so there was much uncertainty about how this would affect the voting outcome. As mentioned above, Russia announced at the beginning of COP that it was withdrawing from the Ramsar Convention due to its 'politicisation' (referring to the Ukraine resolution).

Furthermore, a number of resolutions on wetlands were successfully adopted at the COP. The full list of these is listed on the official website of the Ramsar Convention. There was genuinely good cooperation within the EU group, which meant that the EU achieved a lot in the negotiations and contributed constructively by providing many meeting leaders and by contributing constructively to the negotiations.

Cooperation with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions was a general common focal point. This was reflected, for example, in the adoption of the same definition of OECMs for Ramsar, which is used under the UN Biodiversity Convention, so that wetlands can more easily contribute to achieving the goal of the Kunming-Montreal agreement of 30% protected areas.

Additionally, a number of decisions were adopted regarding bird flyways, and a new partnership to find funding for data on waterfowl was adopted.

Many resolutions were procedural or technical, focussing, for example, on the implementation of scientific and technical aspects. Others focused on youth empowerment and education, while others addressed the incorporation of traditional knowledge in wetland conservation.

The most significant decision on which consensus could not be reached was the amended draft resolution on the Ramsar List and a revision of how member countries should report on their Ramsar wetlands (the Ramsar Information Sheets), where there has been a major problem with a lack of reporting, due to what is perceived as excessive complexity. The lack of consensus reflected issues regarding territorial conflicts. Regarding the revision of the Ramsar Information Sheets, however, a new resolution was adopted, enabling the secretariat and a new working group to proceed with this central task.

Several side events also took place during the conference. Countries shared experiences with national wetland inventories and data management tools, innovative financing mechanisms were explored to support wetland protection and restoration, and events emphasised connectivity between wetlands, migratory birds, people and institutions. Finally, the launch of two new Ramsar Regional Initiatives, the Southern Africa Ramsar Regional Initiative (SARRI) and the Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative (IBRRI) Strategic Plan 2025-2030 took place.

Czechia, France, Georgia and Italy were elected to the Standing Committee for the Europe region for the next three-year period, with Hungary, Serbia, Montenegro and Poland as alternates.

At the last Plenary, it was officially announced that the next Ramsar COP16, in 2028, would take place in Panama.
