

## Agenda Item 9.4

### **Consideration of the foundational documents of the IMC: Operational Guidelines for Scientific and Technical Subgroup of the International Mangrove Center**

#### **The Council is invited to:**

1. Consider and adopt the *Operational Guidelines for Scientific and Technical Subgroup of the International Mangrove Center*;
2. Instruct the Secretariat to initiate the process for establishing the Scientific and Technical Subgroup in accordance with the Operational Guidelines once adopted, and to support the STG in identifying priority areas and developing its work plan for consideration at the 2nd Meeting of the Council.

#### **Note**

1. Pursuant to paragraph 4 of Article VI of the Establishment Agreement, the Council shall establish a Scientific and Technical Subgroup (STG) as its advisory body. The STG is intended to provide scientific and technical guidance and advice to the Council, the Member States, and the Secretariat and to other users working on mangrove and adjacent wetlands issues, in order to promote international cooperation and joint actions in mangrove and relevant wetlands conservation, restoration, and wise and sustainable use.
2. The draft Operational Guidelines for the STG were developed with reference to the Operational Guidelines for Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) of the Convention on Wetlands and through four rounds of consultation with Member States, signatory States and observer organizations. The first round was conducted from 9 December 2025 to 23 January 2026, the second round from 10 to 27 February 2026, the third round from 13 March to 1 April, and the fourth round was from 30 April to 13 May. A total of 20 comments were received from 12 States and observer organizations. The comments addressed issues such as the composition and expertise of the STG, the roles and responsibilities of the Chair and Vice-Chair, reporting arrangements, links with national implementation frameworks, knowledge exchange, feedback mechanisms, and the relationship between the STG and the Secretariat. The Interim Secretariat incorporated the majority of these suggestions into the revised text. Explanations were provided for four proposals that could not be incorporated, concerning leadership and reporting arrangements, the specification of expertise requirements, and the inclusion of particular activities within the STG mandate, as these would affect the flexibility and effectiveness of the STG, undermine leadership

continuity, and blur the distinction between the Operational Guidelines and the STG's work plans. The updated draft, reflecting the outcomes of the four consultation rounds, was circulated to all States and observers on 8 July 2026.

3. The Operational Guidelines consist of eight sections and 58 paragraphs, establishing a comprehensive framework for the operation of the STG. The sections cover the purpose and oversight of the STG, its structure, membership, roles and responsibilities, selection process, operational arrangements, work cycle, and guidance development. Following adoption by the Council, the Operational Guidelines will provide the basis for the establishment and operation of the STG.

## **Operational Guidelines for the Scientific and Technical Subgroup of the International Mangrove Center**

### **I. Definition and Purpose of the Scientific and Technical Subgroup**

1. In accordance with the Establishment Agreement of the International Mangrove Center (IMC), the Scientific and Technical Subgroup (STG) is an expert advisory body established by the Council to provide scientific and technical advice in support of the implementation of the IMC. STG members shall be recommended by the Member States and selected by the Council.
2. The purpose of the STG is to provide scientific and technical guidance and advice to the Council, the Member States, and the Secretariat and to other users working on mangrove and adjacent wetlands issues, in order to promote international cooperation and joint actions in mangrove and relevant wetlands conservation, restoration, and wise and sustainable use.
3. The STG should provide, in an efficient, timely and effective manner, global, regional and where possible national specific scientific and technical advice, guidance and tools to enable these audiences to respond to the opportunities, challenges and emerging issues of mangrove and adjacent wetlands conservation, restoration, and wise and sustainable use.

### **II. Oversight of the STG**

4. The priority thematic work areas of the STG will be approved at the Council meeting in line with the meeting of Conference of the Contracting Parties of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar COP). The annual work plan and the budget for the current year will be approved at each meeting of the Council. The determination of thematic work areas and the work plan has to be aligned with the strategic plan of the IMC.
5. Between Council meetings and with the Council's approval, the Secretariat will assist the Council to direct, oversee, and follow up on the implementation of the STG's work. The Chair of the STG will report to each Council meeting on the STG's progress and recommend for the consideration of the Council any adjustments as necessary.
6. The Secretariat, authorized by the Council, will oversee the work of the STG with the following responsibilities:
  - i) to provide recommendation on the selection of potential members, Chair, Vice-Chair of the STG for the Council's review and approval;
  - ii) to oversee the implementation of the STG's programme, and report progress to each Council meeting with recommendations for action as required;

- iii) to guide and support the STG as required;
  - iv) to recommend the allocation of funds for STG tasks to the Council; and
  - v) to oversee STG expenditures.
7. The Secretariat will continue to support the STG in administrative, external relations and information management. The Secretariat's responsibilities include:
- i) facilitating the work of the STG, including by organizing and administering its meetings and maintaining the STG Workspace;
  - ii) fostering opportunities for collaboration with the Convention on Wetlands, other relevant conventions, international organizations, including financial organizations, intergovernmental institutions, and national and international NGOs, and facilitating such collaboration as required;
  - iii) facilitating linkages between potential experts within countries, regions and globally, including indigenous peoples and local communities;
  - iv) identifying the needs of potential audiences and thematic priorities in different countries or regions to suggest to the Member States for their consideration;
  - v) providing contact information including IMC Focal Points, Ramsar National Focal Points and Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) Focal Points, managers of mangrove sites, wetland organizations, past STG members and other relevant contacts;
  - vi) keeping the Member States, the mangrove and adjacent wetlands conservation community, and the public informed of developments related to the IMC, including the availability of finalized STG products;
  - vii) ensuring all written materials from the STG that are developed for target audiences are clear and readable;
  - viii) publishing and disseminating the guidance, materials and products of the STG, ensuring that policy-makers and other identified audiences have timely and accessible clear guidance they need on identified priority issues; and
  - ix) monitoring the application of the guidance.

### **III. Structure of the STG**

8. The STG will be made up of 18 members from Member States and up to 6 representatives from Observer Organizations. The 18 members, with appropriate scientific and technical knowledge, will be nominated by the Member States and appointed by the Council. Observers representing scientific and technical expert(s) will

be recommended by Member States and other organizations and recognized by the Council. They will include:

- i) six scientific members<sup>1</sup> (academic community, with backgrounds in nature and/or social sciences);
  - ii) twelve technical expert members<sup>2</sup> (practitioners), including six regional expert representatives and six other experts on issues identified for action during the triennium;
  - iii) observer experts, not more than 6, from scientific and technical organizations and networks recognized by the Council (and listed in Annex), who may be invited to support the work of the STG as appropriate.
  - iv) External experts and contributors from scientific and technical organizations and networks may be invited as necessary.
9. The observer organizations recognized by the Council, in Annex where appropriate, will be asked to nominate a representative who is committed to serve for the entire triennium to ensure continuity of participation.
10. Member States may suggest scientific and technical experts to participate as observers in meetings or intersessional processes of the STG with the approval of the STG Chair.
11. Representatives of other organizations not included in Annex requesting to participate as observers in meetings or intersessional processes of the STG may do so with the approval of the STG Chair.
12. The Chair and Vice-Chair will be selected from among the appointed members to the STG.

#### **IV. Role and responsibilities of the STG members**

13. The main collective responsibilities of the STG members are to:
- i) establish the scope, deliverables and approach to delivery for each assigned task, including through scoping workshops as appropriate, and in so doing ensure input from the network of the IMC Focal Points, and other relevant organizations, with attention to the integration of key cross-cutting aspects such as socio-economic dimensions, community engagement, gender considerations and other relevant aspects;
  - ii) ensure that STG outputs, where possible, support Member States in strengthening

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<sup>1</sup> Responsible for providing advice on the strategic direction of scientific work needed to enhance the development of STG products, and ensure the scientific quality of the finished products.

<sup>2</sup> Responsible for preparation of technical products in the form of guidance, technical briefing notes, Mangrove/Wetland Technical Reports, etc., and solicit input and feedback on these from stakeholders and partners in all the IMC regions.

- national implementation of mangrove and adjacent wetlands conservation, restoration, wise and sustainable management, under the guidance of the Council;
- iii) ensure appropriate peer review of draft materials, and consult with peers and the Secretariat on how best to ensure their effective communication and implementation;
  - iv) review all scientific and technical materials drafted by IMC bodies, consulting with the Secretariat and the IMC Focal Points as required, before they are shared with Member States and the Council and thereafter;
  - v) encourage their own national and international networks of mangrove and wetland experts to contribute more widely to the work of the STG and disseminate its final products;
  - vi) assist the Secretariat with scientific and technical issues upon request, including pilot project proposals, strategic plan, and other documents;
  - vii) upon request and in urgent circumstances where a critical issue arises affecting mangrove and adjacent wetlands ecosystem, assist Member States with scientific and technical aspects, as subject to availability of resources; and
  - viii) avoid any conflict of interest, STG members will not be compensated for their contributions to the STG. Members preparing substantive work should not be involved in reviewing it. All members should sign a “conflict of interest” declaration when they accept the nomination to the STG.
14. The STG Chair must have broad knowledge of mangrove, marine-coastal wetlands, and wetland issues and be familiar with the work of the STG, the IMC, and the Convention on Wetlands. The Chair will:
- i) prepare the agendas for STG meetings. The Chair also prepares relevant meeting papers with the assistance of the Secretariat and the STG Vice-Chair;
  - ii) chair STG meetings and oversee the conduct of all aspects of those meetings;
  - iii) manage the implementation of the STG work plan and ensure timely delivery of the STG’s products;
  - iv) lead the STG’s work and coordinate the STG’s advice to the next Council meeting concerning new and emerging priorities that the Member States may wish to consider for the STG’s work in the next triennium;
  - v) appoint leads and co-leads of any thematic working groups established by the STG, and advise them on the membership of groups;
  - vi) with the STG Vice-Chair, agree upon the division of responsibilities regarding

- oversight of the thematic working groups or specific task groups established by the STG;
- vii) coordinate inputs from the STG, its thematic working groups and the Secretariat on new and emerging priorities and with the assistance of the STG, identify priority tasks and draft the priority thematic areas of the STG work plan for the coming triennium with the STG members, for approval by the Council;
  - viii) report to each meeting of the Council on the progress of the STG work plan and the priority tasks included in it, and STG-related matters, and provide feedback and guidance to the STG;
  - ix) resources permitting, represent the STG at meetings of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and other processes and initiatives relevant to the STG's work;
  - x) at the request of the Director General of the Secretariat, represent the IMC's scientific and technical work externally by maintaining relationships with partner organizations and, resources permitting, by participating in scientific forums and conferences;
  - xi) recommend to the Council and the Secretariat for its consideration the names of members eligible for reappointment for a subsequent triennium based on their contributions to the STG's work and the relevance of their expertise to the Council-assigned priority tasks; and
  - xii) maintain records of the hours devoted to contributing to the work of the STG, to facilitate reporting of inputs.
15. The STG Vice-Chair must also have broad knowledge of mangrove, marine-coastal wetlands, and wetland issues and be familiar with the work of the STG, the IMC and the Convention on Wetlands. The Vice-Chair will:
- i) help the Secretariat and STG Chair prepare agendas and other papers for STG meetings;
  - ii) substitute for the STG Chair in chairing STG meetings and overseeing the conduct of all aspects of STG meetings;
  - iii) advise, along with the STG Chair and the Secretariat, the leads and co-leads of working groups on the membership of groups;
  - iv) with the STG Chair, agree upon the division of responsibilities regarding oversight of the thematic working groups or specific task groups established by the STG;
  - v) resources permitting, substitute for the Chair in representing the STG at meetings of MEAs and relevant processes and initiatives;

- vi) at the request of the Director General of the Secretariat, represent the IMC's scientific and technical work externally, through maintaining relationships with partner organizations and, resources permitting, by participating at scientific forums and conferences; and
  - vii) when requested, substitute for the STG Chair in any other of his or her functions; and maintain records of the hours devoted to contributing to the work of the STG, to facilitate reporting of inputs by the STG Chair.
16. The members will:
- i) ensure the scientific quality of finished products;
  - ii) provide independent advice to the Director General of the Secretariat and STG Chair on emerging scientific issues;
  - iii) support and champion the STG and its work;
  - iv) prepare guidance to inform policy-makers and practitioners, and seek input and feedback on these from stakeholders and partners in all the IMC regions; and
  - v) assist communication and public awareness of IMC as appropriate with the review, dissemination, promotion and implementation of guidance in relevant networks, countries and regions.
17. Representatives of Observer Organizations are invited to:
- i) ensure that the scientific and technical capacity of their organizations' national, regional and international networks of mangrove and wetland experts (where applicable) are available to the STG, and establish mechanisms to identify and engage experts from their networks in the work of the STG;
  - ii) identify to the STG and its working groups any work relevant to STG tasks already in existence or underway through their processes and initiatives;
  - iii) advise on emerging and priority development issues and trends;
  - iv) participate in any relevant working group and task forces established by the STG;
  - v) support and promote the STG's work;
  - vi) create opportunities for partnerships, collaborations and financing; and
  - vii) leverage the outreach capacity of their organization to share information about and help disseminate STG products after they are finalized.
18. The IMC Focal Points of each Member State act as a liaison between their national mangrove and adjacent wetlands practitioners, other IMC Focal Points and the STG.



They are appointed to the role for their scientific and technical expertise in wetland conservation, management and wise use. The Secretariat should ensure a more effective link between STG and IMC Focal Points in such a way that Member States technical needs be addressed in the STG work programme. IMC Focal Points are expected to:

- i) provide technical and scientific input and support to the implementation of the work plan of the STG;
  - ii) contribute to identifying national technical priorities and knowledge gaps that may inform the STG thematic work areas and guidance products;
  - iii) maintain regular contact with other IMC and Ramsar National Focal Points in their country (Ramsar Focal Point and CEPA Focal Points);
  - iv) mobilize local capacity and, to the extent possible, consult with and seek input from other experts and bodies and mangrove and wetlands centers in their country, including focal points of other RRI and MEAs;
  - v) the IMC Focal Points should provide advice to, and participate in, meetings of the National Mangrove and Wetland/Ramsar Committee or similar bodies (e.g., National Biodiversity Committees) where they exist and provide their national reports to the Council. They should also assist in disseminating information on the work of the STG, interpreted as appropriate to the national context, to relevant individuals and bodies in their countries;
  - vi) provide technical support to national mangrove/wetland activities such as the preparation of mangrove/wetland inventory; and
  - vii) help disseminate STG products and information on its work, adapted as appropriate to the national context.
19. While STG membership is undertaken on a voluntary basis, participation in the STG provides important non-monetary benefits to its members. These include professional recognition at the international level, opportunities for scientific and technical exchange, strengthened international and regional networks, enhanced understanding of policy–science interfaces, and capacity development through engagement in collaborative guidance development and advisory processes. Such benefits contribute to strengthening individual expertise and institutional capacity, and support sustained engagement of qualified experts in the work of the STG.

## **V. Selection of STG members**

20. Immediately after the Council meeting, the Secretariat will make a call for nominations of the STG members for the coming triennium, which includes information on the

- specific profiles required for the technical and scientific members.
21. The members and observers for each triennium will be recommended by the Secretariat for appointment and approval by the Council as soon as possible after the Council meeting, from the candidates nominated according to the process below.
  22. Member States from each IMC region will reach agreement internally and nominate two technical experts for each region who will be accepted automatically.
  23. Member States will nominate members per needs as identified and the nominations will then be reviewed and shortlisted by regional consensus.
  24. Member States will also make nominations for the six scientific members, and six technical members, and may identify candidates for STG Chair and Vice-Chair, including from candidates nominated under paragraph 22.
  25. STG members will be appointed in their personal capacity for their scientific and technical expertise, and will not represent any organization or government in their interaction with the STG. Selections will be made to secure the scientific and technical expertise required for the STG's work during the triennium, and ensure regional and gender balance.
  26. Each observer organization may nominate a representative as observer to the STG who may serve for more than one triennium.
  27. Organizations nominating members or observers must provide a letter of recommendation summarizing the expertise of the candidate and the relevance of their work to the STG's work plan.
  28. Nominees will provide a curriculum vitae and a declaration that they are willing to be considered for appointment to the STG and that they have, where relevant, the required support of their organizations on a voluntary basis to deliver the work expected of STG members and the time and availability for meetings. They will note whether they will need any financial support to participate in meetings and will provide a brief summary of how their skills and expertise might contribute to the STG's work.
  29. The Secretariat will forward all nominations and make recommendations for appointments for consideration by the Council, which will reach its decisions through electronic communication and teleconferences when the current STG members' term ends and the new term begins, to enable the STG to start work as early as possible.
  30. If a vacancy for a member of the STG arises between Council meetings, the Council will review among the other proposed nominations and appoint a replacement member as soon as practicable.
  31. Candidates for appointment as members of the STG must have the following:

- i) capacity and experience in local, national and international networking with mangrove and wetland conservation and wise use experts, including when appropriate IMC Focal Points;
- ii) recognized experience and expertise in one or more aspects of mangrove and wetland conservation and wise use, particularly those relevant to the identified priorities for the forthcoming work of the STG;
- iii) full access to electronic mail and the online systems which the STG will use;
- iv) proficient comprehension of at least one of the official languages of the IMC (English and Chinese); and
- v) commitment to undertake the work of the STG and its working groups, and the support, where relevant, of their organization, enabling them to deliver the work expected of STG members on a voluntary basis.

## **VI. Term of STG membership**

- 32. Beginning with a new triennium, membership of the STG will not in principle be for more than one triennium with the possibility to be re-elected for a second term, to allow rotation in the STG composition. However, those experts whose experience is considered relevant for the tasks of the STG could be re-elected for a third term. The maximum tenure of any member, including the Chair and Vice-Chair, will be three triennia (nine years).
- 33. For each triennium, whenever possible at least six members of the outgoing STG will be retained to ensure continuity. On each occasion, the STG Chair and Vice-Chair and the Secretariat will propose the STG members for reappointment, based on the priority thematic work areas for endorsement by the Council.
- 34. Members being proposed for reappointment must have demonstrated the ability to contribute effectively to the work of the STG and must confirm their willingness to be reappointed.

## **VII. Operation of the STG**

- 35. The STG will develop collaborative relationships with the Organization Observers, thematic experts and regional organizations relevant to its priority work areas, and where feasible, directly with mangrove/wetland managers and users of mangroves and wetlands.
- 36. The STG will work with Member States and IMC bodies, to identify, categorize, and utilize existing networks of mangrove and adjacent wetlands practitioners and users. The Secretariat will maintain regular contact and key network contacts to facilitate the dissemination of STG products and feedback collection.

37. The STG will, where appropriate, promote technical exchange and knowledge sharing among Member States, Organization Observers, and relevant partners, including practitioners and user of mangroves and wetlands.
38. The STG will hold an annual meeting regularly to review progress on identified tasks and to consider urgent emerging issues prior to the meeting of the Council. Following the Ramsar COP meeting, the STG will develop the areas of work, aligned with the IMC strategic plan, for the Council for its consideration and approval for the next triennium.
39. The appointed STG members will, where appropriate and with the assistance of the Secretariat, establish working groups at the start of each triennium to address tasks in the approved work plan and lead or co-lead them as appointed by the STG Chair.
40. Meetings of the STG will operate in English and Chinese, and meeting documents will be made available in the IMC languages, subject to the availability of resources.

#### **VIII. The STG's three-year cycle of work**

41. There are four stages in the STG's triennial cycle of work. Each stage has specific targets to be met before the STG can progress to the next stage.

##### **Stage 1: Setting the priorities for the coming triennium**

42. The STG will report to each Council meeting on the status of issues addressed in the previous Council meetings, including all tasks agreed by the Council, and propose how any remaining tasks will be completed, or suggest alternative solutions if necessary.
43. The STG, in consultation with the Secretariat and the IMC Focal Points, will draft a report which will identify scientific and technical priorities, funding needs, and potentially relevant partner organizations for the coming triennium for the consideration of the Council meetings.
44. The list of priorities will reflect the content of the IMC Strategic Plan for the coming triennium, decisions of the last Council meetings, and other priority issues which have been identified by regional or global wetland networks.

##### **Stage 2: Council approval of priorities and work plan for STG programming**

45. The draft report will be presented to the Council on the products delivered during the last triennium, proposing a list of potential themes and a revised list of potential observer organizations for the coming triennium.
46. The Council will approve a maximum of four priority thematic work areas for each triennium, and the one-year work plan under the selected thematic work areas, and approve an appropriate allocation of funds.

47. The STG will develop an annual work plan based on the approved thematic work areas. This involves making recommendations on specific tasks and the budget to facilitate actions identified in the related IMC Strategic Plan goal/target/indicator. This process includes undertaking a literature review of available STG guidance and consulting with the Secretariat, and the IMC Focal Points. The annual work plan will be presented by the STG Chair to the Council for consideration and approval.

### **Stage 3: Convening the STG**

48. The STG will convene as soon as possible after the Council meeting. The Council, with the assistance of the Secretariat will select the STG members intersessionally, as soon as possible after receiving the nominations from the Secretariat. The Secretariat will first select the Chair and Vice-Chair, who will participate in the selection of the other members.

### **Stage 4: Deliver and disseminate the products**

49. The various scientific and technical products will be prepared and communicated to target audiences during the triennium, with assistance from the Secretariat.

### **Target audiences and the process of developing guidance materials**

50. Two target audience categories have been identified for the materials to be developed by the STG:
- i) Policy-makers, including those from the environment, natural resources, and water sectors and other related sectors such as energy, health and sanitation, agriculture, forestry, infrastructure; and
  - ii) Practitioners and in particular mangrove and wetland managers and stakeholders, but also others from related fields, such as protected area managers and staff of wetland education centers.
51. The STG will produce the following types of guidance:
- i) Scientific guidance, which provides the basis for technical guidance for policy makers and practitioners.
  - ii) Science-based technical guidance, which responds to specific methodological needs of policy-makers and practitioners with each receiving a different type of technical guidance.
52. The main audience for the scientific guidance will be practitioners. The STG guidance will draw on published peer-reviewed research and other scientific sources to help advance the work of IMC and the implementation of the Convention on Wetlands.
53. Technical guidance will be the main focus for STG products. All STG guidance will be

science-based.

54. The main audience for the technical guidance will be policy-makers and practitioners, while users of mangrove and wetlands may also benefit from it. It will be delivered through formats including handbooks, manuals, fact sheets, webinars and videos with support of the Secretariat.
55. Member States will request scientific and technical guidance from the STG through the Secretariat and STG Chair which will facilitate the fulfilment of the support requested by Member States, as appropriate.
56. The approach to the development of guidance will not only reflect national needs but also seek a regional approach. The Secretariat and the IMC Focal Points will collaborate to define national and regional priorities and needs.
57. The Secretariat will ensure all materials are clear and accessible, and relevant to targeted audiences. It will monitor and evaluate the reach and impact of the products, and report its findings to the STG.
58. The process for developing guidance will be as follows:
  - i) The Member States will identify the audience for each of the proposed technical products, and the Secretariat will help to define the needs of each audience group.
  - ii) The Secretariat will work with the STG members to determine the type, content, format and design for each technical product.
  - iii) The STG members will identify sources of information and existing guidance, and then develop the guidance, in line with the selected thematic work areas and the current IMC Strategic Plan.
  - iv) Additional explanatory summaries, and interpretive information related to the technical guidance directed at policy-makers, will be developed by the Secretariat.
  - v) The Secretariat will communicate and distribute the guidance, with assistance from STG members, Organization Observers, the IMC Focal Points and other partners.
  - vi) The Secretariat will lead on monitoring the application of the guidance and report on this to the STG and the Council.
  - vii) The Secretariat will commission a periodic review of the use of the application and effectiveness of STG guidance and report on this to the Council.

## **Annex**

Potential organizations to serve as observers for the 2026–2028 triennium:

- China Wetlands Association (CWA)
- The East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP)
- Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative (IBRRI)
- Mangrove Conservation Foundation (MCF)
- Ramsar Regional Center – East Asia (RRC-EA)
- Ramsar Regional Centre for Training and Research in the Western Hemisphere (CREHO)
- Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of Mangroves and Coral Reefs
- Ramsar Regional Initiative on Black and Azov Seas Coastal Wetlands (BlackSeaWet)
- Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands
- Wetlands International (WI)
- World Coastal Forum (WCF)
- WWF International
- WWT