

RAC/RAN GUIDELINES

Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of
Regional Activity Centres (RACs) and Regional Activity Networks (RANs)

Summary of Comments Received and Secretariat Responses

*Prepared for the Virtual Intersessional Meeting of National and Protocol Focal Points (Virtual)
18–19 August 2026*

Objective

- This presentation accompanies the revised draft Guidelines, circulated in both a clean version and a version showing all tracked changes and reviewer comments.
- It gives Contracting Parties a concise view of the comments received and how each was addressed — without requiring a paragraph-by-paragraph review.
- Comments were received from several Contracting Parties over the course of the review process.
- This summary groups comments by theme, since several Parties raised closely related points and how they were resolved.

Background and Mandate

- COP 18 Decision IV requested the Secretariat to provide an updated version of the RAC/RAN Guidelines, aligned with Pre-COP comments and written comments submitted afterward.
- The Guidelines under review are a revision of the draft presented to COP 18 (October 2025); the document name remains as presented there.

Decision IV further requested the Secretariat to share the final version of the RAC/RAN Guidelines with Contracting Parties intersessionally for final review, and to convene an intersessional meeting no later than the end of 2026 for possible endorsement, pending available resources.

This Virtual Intersessional Meeting is convened to fulfil that mandate. Endorsement depends on Parties reaching agreement on the text, including the items set out in Part Two; formal adoption will follow, guided by the Bureau.

Scope of the Review

238

individual comments
recorded

11

themes —
all resolved

2

citations verified
and inserted

4

substantive items for
Intersessional discussion

Every comment has received a substantive response — either a textual amendment or a clarifying explanation.

Eleven groups of comments addressed

- 1 Terminology
- 2 Paragraph numbering, ToC & cross-references
- 3 Delegation of COP oversight
- 4 Institutional character of RANs & reporting flow
- 5 Language that could read as legally binding
- 6 “Re-designation” terminology
- 7 Annex sequencing
- 8 Emphasis on external/global frameworks
- 9 Precision and consistency edits
- 10 Most suggested edits accepted
- 11 Legal & historical citations

Institutional oversight and the character of RANs

Delegation of COP oversight

Comments noted that COP oversight of RACs/RANs may in practice be exercised through a Protocol COP, STAC or Steering Committee. A new general clause now states oversight may be exercised directly or through a delegated body.

Institutional character of RANs

RANs, as informal networks rather than legal entities, cannot “report” or “provide expertise” as an institution. Provisions were revised so RAN members prepare the substantive content, with the coordinating RAC or CCS channelling it forward. This addresses issue of a RAC reporting to itself or overburdening RACs with reporting responsibility.

Non-binding character, and citations now confirmed

Language that could read as legally binding

Wording softened where it could be read as imposing obligations beyond the Guidelines' non-binding character e.g. the RAC dissolution procedure was rewritten to state clearly who may propose dissolution and who decides; the imprecise “non-binding” description of RANs was corrected.

Legal & historical citations

Two requests for precise citations were verified and inserted: Article 15.1(e) of the Cartagena Convention together with COP Decision (2002) establishing RACs and RANs; and the COP Decision (2008) adopting the predecessor Guidelines this revision supersedes.

Structure, naming and scope refinements

Structure & naming

Terminology standardised (“CCS,” “Annex,” spelled-out protocol names); numbering and Table of Contents corrected after restructuring; Annexes reordered so the Evaluation Framework and Model sit together; “re-designation” replaced with existing, defined language.

Scope: external/global frameworks

Concern that the draft placed undue emphasis on RACs’/RANs’ role in external global frameworks. A stand-alone “Global Context” section was removed; remaining references were scoped explicitly to the Convention and its Protocols, or made conditional on the COP approved Work Plan and Decisions.

PART TWO

Additional Substantive Comments for Discussion at the Intersessional Meeting

These comments raise substantive policy questions including programmatic priorities, financial arrangements, and the Guidelines' relationship to external frameworks that the Secretariat considers should be placed before Contracting Parties rather than resolved unilaterally.

Data validation and information security

Comment received

Internal validation and information-security measures should apply, in line with national law, to scientific communications exchanging raw or processed data from official Party databases.

Secretariat reflection

A legitimate data-governance concern, but one that engages each Party's own national law on data classification. Best developed with input from all Parties' competent national authorities, not drafted by the Secretariat alone.

Recommended for discussion at the Intersessional meeting

Technical validation of early environmental alerts

Comment received

Before international dissemination, early environmental alerts issued by RACs should require technical validation by official monitoring agencies of affected Parties.

Secretariat reflection

This would add a mandatory approval step, in tension with RACs' technical autonomy to respond rapidly to transboundary threats. A genuine trade-off between speed and national oversight for Parties to consider e.g. experience of RAC REMPEITC Caribe.

Recommended for discussion at the Intersessional meeting

How far should RACs'/RANs' mandates extend?

Comment received

It is recommended that the Guidelines explicitly reference the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, SDG 14 indicators, and collaboration with national statistical institutes.

Secretariat reflection

This points in the opposite direction from other comments received, which asked that references to external global and regional frameworks be reduced leading to the removal of a stand-alone “Global Context” section (see Spotlight, Section 1). Both positions are coherent; they reflect different views on how far RACs'/RANs' mandates should extend beyond the Convention. Since the revision has already applied the more restrictive reading, the Secretariat has not unilaterally reintroduced the broader framing. This is an important scope question for Parties to resolve directly.

Recommended for discussion at the Intersessional meeting

A baseline, core-funding allocation from the CTF?

Comment received

Placing the primary financial burden for core operational costs exclusively on individual Host Governments risks institutionalizing an unstable, project-to-project existence. Recommends amending Paragraph 31 to establish a baseline, core-funding allocation from the CTF for basic administrative continuity and multilingual obligations for all designated RACs.

Secretariat reflection

One of the most substantive comments received. This is a resource-allocation and Trust Fund governance decision with real budgetary implications and burden-sharing effects across all Contracting Parties not only host governments and goes contrary to previous COP Decision. A change of this magnitude to CTF financial commitments should be adopted, if at all, by COP or intersessional decision, informed by the CTF's own financial position and the views of all Parties.

Recommended for discussion at the Intersessional meeting

Items recommended for Discussion

Area	Item
Data governance	Internal data validation & security measures for scientific communications
Technical autonomy	Mandatory national validation step for early environmental alerts
Mandate scope	Whether to reference external statistical/biodiversity frameworks (SEEA, Kunming-Montreal, SDG 14)
Financial arrangements	Baseline, core-funding allocation from the CTF for RAC host governments

- Clean and tracked-changes versions of the Guidelines are circulated alongside this summary.
- Eleven themes have been addressed.
- Four items are recommended for Contracting Parties' further discussion and guidance at this meeting.
- Endorsement depends on Parties accepting revisions and reaching agreement on those four items, with formal adoption to follow under the Bureau's guidance.