

**STATEMENT BY EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF CMS
AT STANDING COMMITTEE,
8 June 2009, Geneva**

“CMS – Travelling Bravely Forward”

It is tragic that so much time, effort and resources are being consumed in an unnecessary and unproductive conflict about the senior management of the CMS Secretariat. My commitment and devotion to this remarkable and unique Convention remain undiminished after almost 20 years during which I have had the privilege to serve the Parties as a country representative, variously as Chairman of the Standing Committee, as Chairman of the COP Committee of the Whole, as Chairman of the COP itself, as UNEP’s observer at CMS meetings, and since 2004 as Executive Secretary.

I remember where CMS was when I became the UK focal point in January 1991. The Convention was struggling to survive. It had not been able to create a CMS-led species agreement after 12 years of existence. There were only about 35 Parties, mostly European.

What happened? We persevered in the true interests of conservation. We targeted our efforts on two draft Agreements – one for bats and one for small whales. By the time of the 3rd COP of CMS in September 1991 in Geneva the bats agreement was virtually ready to sign off, and we were able to do the same for the small whales agreement by devoting several sessions of the Plenary to the negotiation. These were the first two CMS-led regional species agreements created – better known to us all now as EUROBATS and ASCOBANS. Their creation actually saved the Convention.

It was human perseverance that built CMS and allowed it first to survive and then to flourish. The hard work continued, COP by COP, as we put more agreements in place, and created new tools such as the concerted and co-operation Action Programmes for Annex I and Annex II species, and the CMS Special Grants Programme. The platform I inherited in 2004 as Executive Secretary was immeasurable stronger than in 1991, thanks to 12 years of relentless hard work by committed Partners, the Scientific Council and my predecessor.

From this position, we have as a Convention been able to increase the rate of progress over the last 5 years very tangibly. The number of Parties has grown by almost 30% to 111, 30 more countries are members of CMS Agreements. More importantly, the majority of Parties are now from Latin America, Africa, Asia and Oceania, transforming us into a truly global body.

We have doubled the number of species Agreements and MOUs– from 12 to 24. These have come thick and fast in the last 3 years. Elephants, African and Pacific Cetaceans, Gorillas, Saiga Antelope, South American Grassland birds and flamingoes, Atlantic monk seals, Africa-Eurasian birds of prey, Indian Ocean and Pacific dugongs and hopefully by the end of 2009, sharks and houbara bustards. Now of course we are re-directing our priority towards implementation and capacity building, as agreed by Parties in Rome.

Our financial resources have increased. Above all our ability to attract project contribution which have risen by over 300%, and, for the first time, the input of major resources from our voluntary sector partners (notable through staff secondments) and the commercial sector (sponsorship for Years of the Dolphin and Gorilla and individual projects).

We have developed many new partnerships – and many other Agreements have been signed with other partners, including Birdlife International, Wetlands International, CIC, WDCS, IFAW, AMMPA, WCS and WAZA. With the help of the CITES Secretariat here in Geneva, we have re-energised the CMS-CITES partnership by focusing on migratory species also affected by trade, such as saiga and elephants.

We have deployed the energy and commitment of youth to conserve migratory species through a new intern scheme which has already attracted more than 100 graduates and students to work with us in the last 3 years.

We have an active outreach campaign producing a stream of highly commended publications such as those on wildlife watching, climate change and migratory species, Sahelo-Saharan antelopes and gorillas. Later this month we will launch our new publication on flyways at the 30th Anniversary Celebration. Then we have the highly successful and visible CMS “Year of” campaigns, undertaken with our NGO and commercial partners – Year of the Turtle in 2006, Year of the Dolphin in 2007-2008 and

the current 2009 campaign – Year of the Gorilla which is going from strength to strength and will hold a major seminar in Frankfurt Zoo Society starting tomorrow.

Last week we opened our first major office outside Europe, in Abu Dhabi, which will administer the new birds of prey and dugong agreement. It is generously financed by Abu Dhabi and presents us with a huge opportunity to engage more fully with the countries which surround the Indian Ocean. This agreement did not fall from a tree. It had to be worked for, and it now has to be justified by hard conservation work without distractions. Overseeing the creation of the Abu Dhabi office, which will be managed by my experienced former Deputy Lahcen El Kabiri, is one of the key tasks I set myself after our recent Conference of Parties in Rome. The COP stabilised our budget and increased our HQ staff by 10% on top of the 33% increase made possible by the new office in Abu Dhabi. Last week, despite current distractions, I finalized the selection of 3 highly qualified professional staff for the new office. The office gives us a unique opportunity to spread our wings, but we must do it in a coherent way, maintaining the closest possible co-operation between Bonn and Abu Dhabi, echoing the existing relations between Bonn and our small “turtle” outpost in Bangkok.

Looking West, as well as East, another of the key tasks I am determined to complete before my retirement in 2012 is to build a strong working partnership with the US Government, and either secure or substantially advance their future accession to the Convention. I am perhaps uniquely well-placed to take an active, senior role in relations with the US. I have considerable experience of working with them on other issues,

notably CITES and environmental law enforcement. Through the generosity of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, I was able to secure free offices in Washington last year where we now have a dynamic Hispanic-American consultant, Viviana Jimenez, working day by day to build up our profile, create new partnerships and engage with the key US Government- agencies. I am visiting US once every 3 months or so to add value in the right places. We also have excellent relations with the UNEP Regional Office in Washington.

It is my conviction that CMS cannot afford to lose any momentum in North America. We have a unique opportunity to work with all relevant stakeholders there at a time when it appears possible, even likely that the US is reconsidering whether to join several MEAs, including CBD as well as CMS. Given the close relationship between CBD and CMS the US law-making institutions can be invited to consider ratifying both conventions. I also hope that we can engage the European Commission and Presidency and the traditional friends of US in Europe to act in coordination with us to persuade the US to join the Convention. Similarly, I am making strong efforts to recruit Russia, China, Brazil and a number of other key countries for animal migration. The steadily progress we are making in recruiting smaller developing countries to the Convention is a signal that we are regarded as relevant and beneficial to new objectives. In fact I can announce today the 112th Party – Mozambique- will join the Convention in August 2009.

The new Abu Dhabi office and our US initiative are two of the main issues where I believe I can add real value, drawing on almost 20 years experience in CMS. The third is

the review of our future shape and organisation, which has to be completed by the next COP. Having initiated the necessary process of this review in 2007, I think it is vital that CMS Parties can now complete it, drawing on the experience of officers who have knowledge not just of CMS but of other MEAs such as CITES, CBD and Ramsar, and other strong links with NGOs across the spectrum of opinions, and the managerial ability to “make a little go a long way” by careful stewardship of our limited cash resources. Given that the implementation of Future Shape will not start until after COP 10 (and my retirement in January 2012), I can also bring the valuable asset of objectivity. I will help Parties to design an organisational shape for CMS to meet the needs of conservation, not the ambition of individuals.

I must on this occasion remind you of the ideals that presided over the founding of CMS; it is a Convention for conservation – the only UN body specifically devoted to the conservation of species and of their ecosystems. It is fashionable today to assert that our environment must be protected and valued only for its economic potential worth. It is certainly an interesting approach, and there are more and more organizations addressing these aspects of the environment. But that is not what CMS is about – it is about the wonderful spectacle of animals and Nature and the necessity to conserve this for the good of mankind (1st paragr Conv Text); it is about the obligation we have to ensure these treasures are preserved for future generations.

These aspirations have inspired me from the very beginning of my career in conservation and continue to drive my day-to-day work here at CMS.

I deeply wish to see the Convention continue in this direction. It is important to utilize the time before the next COP to maintain its historic legacy.

By helping wildlife first, CMS actually maximizes its benefits for local people, especially in poorer countries, by securing environmental services from ecosystems and providing direct income benefits from tourism and wildlife watching. The CMS record speaks for itself. The Parties and our partners have persevered for 30 years to create it. The further threat to wildlife from global warming makes the Convention – as a specialized treaty for conservation – even more important than ever. CMS's future will be gloomy indeed if, - as has happened at other international conservation bodies – it is weakened by merger, by absorption or by direction from outside. It is the Parties who must defend CMS. It is a fine Convention, and well worth defending. I hope you will continue to do so in the months and years ahead.