



Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

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PRINCIPLES AND GENERAL APPROACH FOR PURSUING POSSIBLE FURTHER WORK ON THE NATIONAL REPORT FORMAT BETWEEN STC45 AND COP12

*Supplementary note to accompany Document UNEP/CMS/StC45/Doc.14:
“Revision of the template for National Reports”*

Introduction

1. Standing Committee Document StC45/Doc.14 proposes various amendments to the current National Report template in order to allow future reporting cycles to align with the tracking of progress towards achievement of the 16 targets in the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023 (SPMS, adopted by COP Resolution 11.2). That Document does not at this stage propose exactly what a new template would look like, and so if the Committee decides to agree the proposals, some further work will be required to incorporate the new/replacement questions into a re-drafted version of the current template.
2. In line with Res.11.2 paragraph 11, it could make sense to use the opportunity at the same time to make some other updating improvements to the existing template, in particular where possible to seek streamlining of the reporting burden on Parties, while maintaining the COP’s crucial capability to monitor and evaluate the most central aspects of Convention implementation. The SPMS expresses international migratory species conservation priorities for the period 2015-2023; but national reporting by Parties to CMS also needs to address implementation of the Convention in other respects and on an on-going basis.
3. Document StC45/Doc.14 proposes to undertake the revision of the template for National Reports in two steps. This supplementary note aims at outlining some principles and a general approach for pursuing further work on the National Report Format between StC45 and COP12, for StC45 information and comments as appropriate. The report “Recommended improvements to the CMS national report format” provided to the Secretariat by UNEP-WCMC in October 2014, already referenced in document StC45/Doc.14, made a number of recommendations covering some matters of national reporting that go beyond those covered for the SPMS targets in Document StC45/Doc.14, and some of the main points in that report are incorporated in the text below.

Specificity, clarity and “closed” questions

4. A general comment running through WCMC’s analysis related to the specificity and clarity of the questions in the format. A considerable proportion of the information reported by Parties in the COP11 round was found to be of no direct relevance to the questions, due possibly to lack of clarity in those questions. Focusing on only the most relevant information will make reports more comparable with each other and should also contribute to reducing the overall burden of the process. In addition to careful wording, achievement of this can also be helped by using “closed” questions where pre-determined response options are provided, such as yes/no check boxes or drop-down menus of multiple-choice answers.

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5. The suggestion has also been made to make more/clearer use of “dependent questions”, where the response category selected for one question determines which follow-up question (if any) subsequently appears (for example answering “yes” brings up a follow-up question about more information, but answering “no” does not). This would shorten the report in respect of aspects that are not applicable to a given Party, and would help to avoid the confusion that was evident in the COP11 round where many Parties responded to questions that were not actually relevant to them.

6. UNEP-WCMC also made recommendations concerning the questions (II.6.1 and III.3.1) about potential new species listings on the Convention Appendices. Several Parties misconstrued these questions or answered them incompletely. It has been recommended to add a hyperlink from the questions to the “Species+” and IUCN Red List databases to provide Parties with quick access to the correct qualifying species for their country.

7. A revised wording of these two questions was suggested as follows (paraphrased, and showing the Appendix I example – an analogous approach would be taken for the Appendix II question):

Q6.1: Is your country a Range State for any other migratory species that is not currently listed in Appendix I and is categorized as Endangered, Critically Endangered or Extinct in the Wild according to the latest IUCN Red List? Yes No

If yes, please list the species that may merit inclusion in Appendix I.

Q6.1a: Is your country taking any steps to propose the listing of any of the species identified above? Yes No

If yes, please provide details of the stage of proposal development.

If no, please provide details of why not.

Species data

8. Species-specific questions in Section II of the template are tailored to individual Parties according to which species occur in the countries concerned. UNEP-WCMC suggested that this approach could be extended also to the more general taxonomic group questions, based similarly on species distribution data. A way of making the use of data for this as up to date as possible would be to link the on-line reporting platform dynamically to the “Species+” database, which in turn could be linked to the CMS species database. Discussions between UNEP-WCMC and the CMS Secretariat have already taken place on this latter linkage and these could usefully be followed up with this additional purpose in view.

9. The Annex to the report format provides a list of all Appendix II species and asks Parties to indicate the status of each one in their territory, choosing one of four options (“Range State”, “not a Range State”, “no information available” or “extinct at national level”) and providing a published distribution reference. If the suggestion above is followed to link the on-line reporting platform to the “Species+” and CMS species databases, this would enable the information there to be displayed to the national report compilers, who would then only need to provide updates, rather than manually re-populating the whole Annex. The approach could be extended to Appendix I species as well as those on Appendix II.

Implementation of COP Resolutions and Recommendations

10. UNEP-WCMC made several general recommendations concerning Section X of the format which asks about implementation of COP Resolutions and Recommendations. Currently 34 Resolutions and 6 Recommendations are mentioned in this section, to which resolutions adopted by COP11 need to be added, and it has been suggested to prune this list down to a few high priority ones on which it is most important to have progress information, and to structure the question in a more closed way, focusing on specific action points in the decision texts.

11. However, if the Parties agree to consolidate COP decisions in the way described in Standing Committee Document UNEP/CMS/StC45/Doc.19/Rev.1 (“Review of Decisions”), that process will have implications for the approach taken to questions in the National Report format about implementation of

COP Resolutions. The development of these two strands of work will therefore need to advance in tandem with each other.

12. An alternative approach may however be possible. An overlap/duplication between Section X and some other specific topics addressed elsewhere in the report format has been noted (this is apparent also from the analysis against the SPMS targets presented in Document StC45/Doc.14). One suggestion is to allocate all questions about progress with (selected priority) Resolutions and Recommendations to the relevant topic questions elsewhere in the format, which would then allow Section X to be deleted. Hyperlinks to the texts of the relevant Resolutions/Recommendations (updated of course in light of any consolidation/repeals) could also be provided.

Strategic coherence and streamlining reporting burdens

13. UNEP-WCMC has recommended a general check to ensure that there is no duplication between the National Report format questions and information provided by other means, so that Parties do not add unnecessary work to their reporting burden. The example cited was a question about contributions to the CMS Trust Fund; but the general principle is that revision of the format should take account of other relevant information flows.

14. The general direction of current thinking is towards aligning future reporting more closely with the structure and priorities (goals and targets) of the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species. Such an approach was also recommended in the UNEP-WCMC review. Within the CMS family, AEWA has updated its national report format in a way that takes the AEWA Strategic Plan into account and includes cross-references to Plan targets; although without going as far as a structural alignment. It may be of interest also to note that the Ramsar Convention Standing Committee at its 52nd meeting in June 2016 approved a revised National Report format for Ramsar COP13 in 2018 which there has been a systematic restructuring to group questions under each of the targets in the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024.

15. As well as potentially following a similar approach in future to that now being pursued in Ramsar, the two Conventions' reporting processes might also be usefully examined for similarities in the content of some of the questions being asked, in case there are ways in which countries which are Parties to both Conventions might be able to streamline their data-gathering to avoid duplication of effort. In Document UNEP/CMS/StC45/Doc.20.1 the Standing Committee is considering an updated Joint Work Plan for the CMS and Ramsar Conventions for 2015-2017, which includes in item 1.1 (carrying forward an item from the previous JWP) "streamlining and harmonisation of reporting processes", which offers a basis for giving attention to this issue.

Next steps

16. With CMS COP12 taking place in October 2017, National Reports will be due from Contracting Parties not later than six months before the COP, ie in April 2017. An on-line questionnaire providing the format for these reports will need to be made available to Parties some months before that, in effect meaning as soon as possible after approval of the way forward by the Standing Committee 45.

17. In the two-stage approach being proposed in document StC45/Doc.14 for the revision of the National Report Format, amendments approved by the Standing Committee on the basis of its discussion of Document StC45/Doc.14 would be incorporated into the template to be used for reporting to COP12, and as a second stage, further proposals would be brought to COP12 for discussion and potential adoption as amendments/streamlining to the template to be used for reporting to COP13 and in subsequent reporting cycles. As mentioned also in Document UNEP/CMS/StC45/Doc.16.1 ("Implementation of the Programme of Work 2015-2017"), this second stage would as necessary take account of the final outcome of work by the Strategic Plan Working Group on indicators, as well as the more in-depth examination of issues discussed in the present note above.