



Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

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RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE OF EMERGING AND RE-EMERGENT DISEASES IN MIGRATORY SPECIES: THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENHANCED PROCESSES OF INTERNATIONAL CO-ORDINATION

(Prepared by Ruth Cromie, Robert Hepworth, Scott Newmann and David Stroud)

Background

1. Diseases of wildlife are a normal cause of mortality and morbidity, and emerging or re-emergent diseases of wildlife can have serious implications for the status of migratory and non-migratory species, especially when populations are small and fragmented.
2. The increased frequency of such diseases has been linked to processes of landscape fragmentation, unsustainable land-use choices, pollution and other types of ecosystem disruption, these being in turn the consequences of unsustainable pressure on resources as highlighted by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. Climate change is anticipated to result in changes in disease distribution and emergence due to altered physiological conditions for hosts and parasites, the latter additionally resulting in the spread of novel micro-organisms with unpredictable consequences or the re-emergence of pathogens in new geographic locations.
3. Domestic animals, wild animals and humans share many pathogens, with wildlife sometimes being natural reservoirs of pathogens that can cause disease in domestic livestock, and that such pathogens have the potential significantly to affect both public health, food production, livelihoods, and wider economies.
4. The theme of Ramsar CoP 10 was '*Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People*', which stressed the functional linkages between the role that wetlands play in providing ecosystem services for the support of dependent human populations and the central role that wildlife populations in that regard, given that aquatic waterbirds and other migratory species can be valuable indicators of ecosystem health.
5. Diseases and the need for coordinated responses to them are becoming increasingly highlighted as an important issue in CMS Agreements, Memoranda and other international instruments for the conservation of migratory species, and that such coordinated surveillance and response efforts require multiple stakeholders responsible for managing the health of humans, livestock, and wildlife.

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Policy and other contexts

6. The CMS Secretariat and Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO)'s Animal Health Service have previously agreed to co-convene an animal disease working group, based on the guiding principles of the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds.

7. However, whilst FAO and others undertake important and valuable work with regard to domestic animal health and human health, concerns have been repeatedly expressed that national and international responses to wildlife health have yet to be acknowledged as an integral element of disease surveillance or monitoring programs, epidemiological investigations, and or outbreak responses.

8. The development of national wildlife disease strategies by some Contracting Parties and other governments has been a welcome development. However, many developing countries lack functional strategies and the infrastructure needed to protect their human health, domestic agricultural and wildlife interests from endemic (native to an area) or introduced diseases. Indeed, without sound local and national vigilance systems, the risk of diseases being accidentally exported globally through trade, introduced non-native species or re-establishment projects is also increased, such that there are strategic benefits in help developing countries improve their animal health-related programmes, policies, and infrastructure given globalization trends and the constant threat of newly emerging as well as resurgent diseases to animal and human health worldwide.

9. In particular, both legal and illegal trade in wildlife has the potential to result in the spread of pathogens.

Possible ways forward

10. There remain major concerns as to the implications of the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) subtype H5N1 of Asian lineage, as reflected, inter alia, by CMS Resolution 8.27, AEWAs Resolutions 3.18 & 4.16, and Ramsar Resolutions IX.23 & X.21, however national and international responses to the spread of HPAI H5N1 might provide useful models for adoption in response to the challenges of other emerging or re-emerging diseases that affect wildlife.

11. The Working Group on Migratory Species as Vectors of Diseases established by the 12th meeting of the Scientific Council might provide a means to develop responses to some of these issues given that integration of both wildlife and domestic animal issues is required to properly understand disease epidemiology as well as address disease transmission, control and prevention.

Action Requested:

The Scientific Council is invited to discuss:

- a. The suggestion that the Secretariat of CMS and FAO's Animal Health Service consider co-convening a new Task Force, the Scientific Task Force on Emerging Diseases of Wildlife.

- b. The value that would come from FAO:
- (i) identifying those diseases that impact both domestic and wildlife species, and which are of greatest concern in regards to food security, economics and sustainable livelihoods;
 - (ii) integrating into their “One World One Health” approach, disease and management issues that can be brought to the attention of the Task Force on Emerging Diseases of Wildlife for consideration and action; and
 - (iii) convening the first meeting of potential partner organisations that could potentially serve as the core organisations included in a Task Force on Emerging Diseases of Wildlife.
- c. The need for the Secretariat of CMS and FAO’s Animal Health Service to discuss with other relevant organisations and stakeholders how CMS and FAO may best add additional value to existing national and international domestic and wildlife disease responses.
- d. The possibility that the Working Group on Migratory Species as Vectors of Diseases might become part of the broader focused Scientific Task Force on Emerging Diseases of Wildlife and to provide guidance related to past accomplishments and future needs.
- e. The need for the Contracting Parties and other governments to fully integrate training with respect to wildlife diseases into veterinary and environmental conservation training programmes and other relevant capacity development.