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HARMONIZING TAXONOMIC LISTS ACROSS MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS

(Prepared by Stephen Garnett)

Summary:

As noted in Resolution 12.27, there has been a long-standing objective to achieve harmonization of lists across the different Multilateral Environmental Agreements. The current discordance has occurred because guidance is lacking on how to choose between different lists of names. The International Union of Biological Sciences (IUBS) has initiated a process to develop guidelines for governance of taxonomic lists. The CMS Scientific Council has been invited to contribute to this process with the idea of developing a system of governance that produces taxonomic lists of sufficient legitimacy to be adopted uniformly across all conventions. Council is asked to approve participation of a delegate of the Council in the IUBS process

HARMONIZING TAXONOMIC LISTS ACROSS MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS

Background

1. All biodiversity-related conventions list species for special protection. However, the taxonomic standards differ among conventions. They also differ between conventions and national lists and other important global lists, such as those used by the IUCN. This incurs substantial transaction and opportunity costs, leads to inefficiencies in the ways in which the conventions are applied, and can cause reputational damage because a 'species' protected under one convention may not be recognized by another.
2. Resolution 12.27 on Taxonomy and Nomenclature, while noting that biological taxonomy and nomenclature are dynamic, recognized that the 4th meeting of the Chairs of the Scientific Advisory Bodies of Biodiversity-related Conventions (CSAB, Gland, Switzerland, 13 February 2011) expressed its support for the idea of moving towards harmonization of nomenclature and taxonomy in lists of species used by the biodiversity-related conventions, and praised the harmonization process undertaken by CITES and CMS.
3. Resolution 12.27 also acknowledged that in order to strengthen the global effort to meet the Aichi Biodiversity Targets of reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by 2020, it would be sensible to try to ensure greater harmonization between biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) in the field of taxonomy and nomenclature.
4. Resolution 12.27 further acknowledged that the harmonization of nomenclature can lead to a more integrated process, reduction of duplication and greater sharing of information between biodiversity-related MEAs and noted that the case for such harmonization was made more compelling by the fact that of the 124 CMS Parties at that time, only one was not also a member of CITES.
5. Resolution 12.27 also recalled that that this objective was noted by the 6th Meeting of the Liaison Group of the Biodiversity-related Conventions (Bonn, May 2008), and was thereby included in the CITES/CMS List of Joint Activities adopted by the 34th Meeting of the CMS Standing Committee (Rome, November 2008); and the CMS-CITES Joint Work Programme 2012-2014 adopted at the 38th meeting of the CMS Standing Committee (Bergen, November 2011).
6. Resolution 12.27 also recognized that the CSAB have repeatedly expressed their support for the idea of moving towards harmonization of nomenclature and taxonomy in the lists of species that they use, and requested stronger cooperation among MEAs towards that goal.
7. Resolution 12.27 also emphasized that stability over time in the taxonomy and nomenclature of species listed under CMS is essential to ensure legal security for the implementation of the Convention
8. Resolution 12.27 also recognized that the taxonomy used in the Appendices to the Convention will be most useful to the Parties if standardized by nomenclatural references.

Issues

9. Resolution 12.27, notwithstanding the consideration given to list harmonization in the preamble, adopted a list of standard references, which it included in an Annex to be recognized and used as the basis on which the CMS Appendices and amendments thereto are prepared. That list of standard references differed from those in CITES and the other MEAs. Furthermore, no recommendations were suggested on ways to further the processes of harmonizing the taxonomy of the MEAs.
10. The confusion of the MEAs is unsurprising. Currently taxonomic nomenclature is governed by a group of organizations that are themselves members of the International Union of Biological Sciences (IUBS) that is itself a member of the International Council of Science. These Commissions have rules by which the names of species and other taxonomic entities are deemed to be valid or otherwise. Various groups, such as the Catalogue of Life, assemble lists of valid names. However, while a name may be valid, there is often disagreement among taxonomists about whether the named entity is a species. Lists of valid species names may therefore not be lists of universally recognized species. There are currently no agreed rules on how such recognition can be achieved.

Discussion

11. The IUBS has now agreed to support a project that aims to develop a governance framework for taxonomic lists, called '*Developing a comprehensive global governance mechanism for aggregating global taxonomic lists*'.
12. The project will run a series of three workshops of which the first (February 2020) will agree on a potential governance framework for taxonomic lists, the second (2021) will bring together advice from a first round of consultations and the third (2022) will present a final version of a governance framework for consideration by users of taxonomic lists such as CMS.
13. A governance framework will provide a set of processes for the assembly of lists that reflect the best of taxonomic science, recognizing that taxonomic science is dynamic, that are transparent and provide processes for revision as appropriate.
14. This project provides an opportunity for CMS and the other MEAs to provide advice on the development of a governance framework that is likely to be considered sufficiently robust and legitimate by the Parties to the MEAs that the lists that are then derived through the framework can then meet the objectives acknowledged, noted, emphasized, agreed and recalled by Resolution 12.27.
15. To this end, organizers of the project workshops have written to the Scientific Council, inviting it to nominate a delegate to attend the workshop associated with the projects (copy of the letter attached). The first workshop is to be held at Charles Darwin University in Darwin, Australia, on 11-13 February 2020, coinciding with the anniversary of Charles Darwin's birthday on 12 February. The costs of attendance by a CMS delegate at the workshops can be covered by the IUBS project, although any contribution that can be made towards attendance of a delegate would be warmly welcomed as that will free up funds to support attendance of other experts without access to support funding.

Recommended Action

16. The Sessional Committee, acting on behalf of the Scientific Council, is therefore recommended to:
 - a) nominate a delegate with appropriate expertise and availability to attend the workshops of the IUBS project;
 - b) instruct the delegate to provide such advice as is appropriate on design of a governance process that is likely to have sufficient legitimacy to generate species lists that can be adopted by all MEAs;
 - c) agree to have the findings of these workshops discussed at appropriate meetings of the Biodiversity-related Conventions (e.g. Chairs of the Scientific Advisory Bodies of the Biodiversity-related Conventions (CSAB), the Liaison Group of the Biodiversity-related Conventions), and bring back recommendations from those groups to subsequent workshops of the IUBS project;
 - d) consider providing financial support for the delegate to attend the IUBS workshops.

ATTACHMENT



Chair
Scientific Council
Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
UNEP/CMS Secretariat
Platz der Vereinten Nationen 1
53113 Bonn, Germany

12 September 2019

Dear Chair

RE: GOVERNANCE OF TAXONOMIC LISTS

I am writing to invite you or a delegate from Scientific Council of the CMS to attend a set of workshops organized under the auspices of the International Union of Biological Sciences with the aim of developing a framework for the governance of taxonomic lists. The project has been designed in recognition that the Convention on Migratory Species has long aspired to harmonization of taxonomic lists with those of other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). However, such harmonization is currently impeded by the lack of a framework for assembling lists of names that is agreed through a transparent process that has legitimacy in the eyes of taxonomists and the users of taxonomy.

Development of such a system of governance should have input from the start from users of such lists. The purpose of this invitation is partly to provide an opportunity from a major user of taxonomy like the CMS to have input from the start.

The first workshop of this project is to be held at Charles Darwin University, in Darwin on the 11th-13th February 2020. We have funds to cover attendance costs, though would be delighted if CMS would consider covering some of the costs itself. We very much hope you can attend.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Garnett'.

Stephen Garnett
Professor of Conservation and Sustainable Livelihoods

on behalf of the project leadership team
Prof. Les Christidis, Southern Cross University, Coffs Harbour, Australia
Dr Stijn Conix, Centre for Logic and Philosophy of Science, Leuven, Belgium
Prof. Mark Costello, University of Auckland, New Zealand
Dr Kevin Thiele, Taxonomy Australia
Prof. Dr. habil. Frank Zachos, Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria