



CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING CONCERNING CONSERVATION, RESTORATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF THE SAIGA ANTELOPE

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THIRD MEETING OF THE SIGNATORIES TO THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING CONCERNING CONSERVATION, RESTORATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF THE SAIGA ANTELOPE

Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 26-29 October 2015

SUMMARY REPORTS OF SESSIONS AT THE TECHNICAL WORKSHOP

I. Summary of the CMS saiga MOU technical meeting on disease

1. The delegates to the technical meeting heard a range of talks on the background to the 2015 mass die-off, and on the programme of work being undertaken to understand the causes of the die-off, and develop potential mitigation strategies for the future. The delegates agreed on the following observations:

The need for ongoing monitoring

2. The reason why the 2015 mass mortality was discovered quickly, and why high quality samples could be taken to help with diagnosis, was the presence of a scientific monitoring team in the field at the time that the disease started. This underlines the need for continued investment in a programme of ongoing scientific monitoring of all saiga populations, even in the absence of disease. This monitoring should include routine collection of samples from individual animals where appropriate (i.e. where this activity does not risk the animal's life or welfare), as well as ecological monitoring on distribution, abundance and vital rates.

3. Monitoring and surveillance gives valuable information for saiga conservation and scientific research, even if there is no disease detected. It is also important to monitor the interactions between livestock populations and saigas, both in terms of disease transmission and habitat use.

Estimating mortality

4. It is challenging to estimate the mortality in mass mortality events, even when there is a high level of monitoring beforehand, as was the case in 2015. The number of corpses collected and buried was 150,044. The difference between the number of saigas in the Betpak-dala population, estimated from aerial surveys before and after the die-off, was 211,200 individuals. Both of these figures relate to adult saigas; a similar number of calves will also have died.

5. It is clear that the estimate based on carcass counts was an under-estimate, because further areas were found during a field expedition in June, containing a substantial additional number of dead saigas. It is unavoidable that the difference between estimates from aerial surveys will be biased, but the degree and direction of that bias is not easily estimable.

6. We therefore agree that the minimum number of adult saigas which died in the mass mortality event was 150,044, but the actual mortality was higher.

The need for controls

7. It is important that monitoring takes place both in sites where die-offs are occurring, and in areas which are unaffected, in order to make proper scientific inferences about the factors which may have caused the die-offs.

The need for inter-disciplinary research

8. It is vital that investigations into mass die-offs include a range of scientific expertise. This could include, for example, veterinarians, ecologists, epidemiologists, climate scientists, rangeland scientists, botanists, physiologists, toxicologists, remote sensing experts, pathologists, microbiologists, parasitologists, meteorologists, social scientists, conservationists, landscape ecologists, wildlife biologists.

Capacity-building

9. There is a need to build on the progress made in the last few years towards building capacity for wildlife disease monitoring, diagnosis and response. This will ensure that there is a highly trained cadre of professional personnel (scientists, field teams) and decision-makers, with access to the required equipment, who are able to respond to disease outbreaks and to carry out long-term monitoring. There is a particular need to focus capacity-building on field teams, and to work within established institutional structures.

Emergency response

10. Agreed protocols, following international best practice, should be developed and followed in the event of a disease outbreak. Funding and capacity are required in order to mount effective emergency responses. Emergency responses should be additional to, not instead of, routine monitoring of all saiga populations.

Characteristics of the 2015 event

11. Every year saigas die from disease in healthy populations, sometimes in large numbers. This is particularly the case for saigas during the birth period, which is highly stressful in this species due to their particular life history strategy. Mass mortality events are distinguished by their very high proportional mortality.

12. In 2015, mortality in affected herds reached close to 100%, which is biologically highly unusual and concerning. This is the key distinguishing factor which makes it critical to understand this event, for effective conservation planning for the species.

13. The proximate cause of the 2015 mortality event is clear, haemorrhagic septicaemia, caused, in the majority, by opportunistic infection with the commensal parasite of saiga, *Pasteurella multocida* serotype B. In addition there is evidence of clostridial enterotoxaemia perhaps in half the cases, also a disease caused by an opportunist *Clostridium perfringens*. These bacteria are latent in the animal in healthy populations. However the triggers and drivers affecting either or both the host and parasite are not yet clear, although there are strong indicators of a potential climatic factor acting at a population or landscape level.

II. Summary of the CMS saiga MOU Technical Meeting on infrastructure

14. The delegates to the Technical Meeting heard a range of talks on the policy processes around infrastructure development internationally, the implementation of the CMS guidelines in Mongolia, and the effects of infrastructure on saigas in Kazakhstan. Following this, two break-out groups were formed, looking at the border fence between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and linear infrastructure. The delegates agreed on the following observations:

Implementing international best practice

15. It is vital that all developments (mineral resource extraction infrastructure, pipelines, roads, railways, fences) adhere to international standards and guidelines on best practice. These include implementing the mitigation hierarchy (avoid, minimise, restore, offset) in order to compensate for impacts on biodiversity of developments. Developers should be expected to pay not only for mitigation, but for monitoring to assess its effectiveness. International standards and guidelines such as IFC1 and IFC6 already exist to do this, including the CMS Guidelines for Addressing the Impact of Linear Infrastructure on Large Migratory Mammals in Central Asia that was adopted by CMS parties at COP11 and other recommendations and guidelines commissioned by CMS. The application of these guidelines is binding for parties to the Convention and shall be promoted within governments but also to developers and national and international funding agencies. It is particularly important to implement landscape-wide conservation and protection of migration corridors for wide-ranging species such as saigas.

International cooperation on the border fence

16. The bilateral Memorandum of Understanding and Action Plan on saiga conservation signed between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which is legally recognized by CMS, requires better and more active implementation. This could include improving communications and exchange of information, for example by holding regular meetings of both government officials and scientists. It is important to continue to push to implement already-agreed mitigation actions over the entire length of the fence, because at the moment this has not been done. This could include engaging with the Eurasian Economic Union regarding the intended function and necessity of the fence.

Engaging scientists in planning decisions

17. It is critical to ensure that the planning process is scientifically based, also decisions made about infrastructure and development. This will reduce risk to wildlife, human and livestock health and the environment more generally. This should be a formal requirement of Environmental Impact Assessments and Strategic Environmental Assessments, but currently is not adequately done. This includes taking scientific advice during development planning, while implementing the development and mitigation, and carrying out scientific monitoring of the impacts of the development and mitigation on wildlife. It also includes retrospective evaluation of impacts of existing developments.

Raising the profile of nature conservation within government

18. It is important that Natural Resources and Agriculture Ministries are involved in discussions with other Ministries on land use and planning, for example, infrastructure, natural resource use, border control, and that they are included in government meetings with companies and developers at an early stage. Taking government and industry officials on visits to

mitigation sites and then holding meetings to explain the aims and outcomes of the mitigation is a good way to raise the profile of nature conservation at the national level. Governments should pay attention to filling the gaps in legislation identified by the CMS's recent reports.

Monitoring impacts on nature

19. It is important to include scientific monitoring of the impact of any developments and associated mitigation. Monitoring pre- and post-construction can give information on the effectiveness of different forms of mitigation, and promote learning and improvement in mitigation methods. This includes monitoring of direct mortality, behavioural changes and distributional changes, as well as of the processes leading to these impacts (such as volume of traffic). Non-invasive monitoring techniques should be used where possible. Satellite-tagging of individuals should be prioritised, as a particularly valuable source of information. This monitoring should lead to action to mitigate impacts.

20. Monitoring can also be carried out cost-efficiently at the border fence to observe injuries and deaths, to see how long carcasses remain before disappearing, and to record signs of poaching. It would be particularly useful to engage with border guards, who are monitoring anyway for other incursions, and could be very helpful, for example in setting and maintaining camera traps and reporting observations in a consistent standard format. This is particularly the case because this is a security zone, so routine monitoring by scientists is difficult.

Interactions between infrastructures

21. There are likely to be synergistic effects of infrastructure developments, which worsen their impacts, and need to be monitored and mitigated. For example, it seems likely from satellite collaring data that migration in the Ustiurt has been heavily impacted by the new railway, which therefore represents an additional barrier to migration as well as the border fence. In Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Mongolia the policy is generally to build new roads alongside railways, which could form a double barrier; an assessment of the individual and synergistic impacts of infrastructure is required during planning for mitigation. Flexible approaches to mitigation such as temporary openings at key times should be considered.

The importance of roads

22. Roads need to be more emphasized as potential sources of impact, whether tarmacked or not, because they can act both as barriers and access routes for poachers. Some roads have iron crash barriers which can form a substantial impediment to movement. Potentially damaging roads are particularly associated with mining sites in Mongolia. Evidence from satellite collared animals in Karaganda suggests that saigas are avoiding a new road.

New settlements

23. It is important to engage with people living in new settlements associated with infrastructure to minimise the risk of additional poaching. They will also bring livestock which may compete with saigas for grazing, act as a disease risk, and change access to water. These threats require monitoring and mitigation as part of the planning process.

III. Summary of the CMS saiga MOU Technical Meeting on poaching and trade

24. The delegates to the Technical Meeting were reminded that Saiga spp. Is included in CITES Appendix II, and that as such, international trade in saiga specimens is allowed provided that it is legal, sustainable and traceable through CITES permits. Range states have however decided not to allow exports. Most legal trade registered under CITES is therefore between Asian consumer countries. Overall, legal international trade seems to decline since 2010, while also the number of seizures that involve international trade in saiga has dropped.

25. The delegates then heard a talk about the use of the SMART monitoring system in the Russian Far East. Following this there was an open discussion of the issues around poaching and trade. The delegates made the following observations:

Improving effectiveness of anti-poaching and trade controls

26. Saiga range states have a number of different institutional structures and agencies with responsibility for anti-poaching activities. In order to improve the effectiveness of anti-poaching activities, there needs to be good communication and interaction between these different agencies. For example in Kazakhstan, all law enforcement agencies have annual meetings to discuss collaboration and joint work; and in China, a regional platform brings together police, customs and related authorities to coordinate and improve combating illegal wildlife trade. China proposes to create similar local-to-local platforms, under the CITES framework, with relevant agencies in neighbouring countries to more successfully address illegal trade in saigas. As well as the more traditional wildlife and nature protection authorities, it has proven to be very useful to include other authorities, such as the police, customs and border authorities. Approaches such as the use of sniffer dogs at borders seem particularly effective. Also it is important to use intelligence to improve efficiency of law enforcement actions.

27. SMART, and similar systems, are useful for improving the effectiveness of anti-poaching patrols and collecting information to monitor spatial and temporal trends in observations of poaching signs and wildlife. Incentivising anti-poaching personnel through bonuses can also be useful. These personnel also require proper resourcing and training in order to carry out their work effectively.

28. All range States have strong penalties in place for poaching offences. It is important to investigate and prosecute, rather than just arrest people or confiscate items, in order to strongly disincentivise poachers and illegal traders, understand illegal trade chains, and dismantle smuggling rings where they exist.

29. Online trade in saiga products and derivatives is an emerging trend, which needs to be monitored and tackled in case illegal specimens are offered, using new approaches.

International cooperation

30. There has been some good international cooperation in recent years, for example joint training events for Mongolian and Chinese inspectors and customs officers. Conventions such as CITES and international non-governmental organizations can be very helpful in supporting and promoting this cooperation. It is vital to extend and deepen transboundary cooperation and joint training in order to improve the effectiveness of trade controls. One option for improving international understanding would be to have exchange visits between neighbouring countries, and between range states and consumer states, so that officers can better understand each other's

procedures and priorities.

31. The effect of the Eurasian Customs Union on trade in wildlife products has been analysed by CITES, and the identified challenges need to be dealt with and opportunities need to be identified.

Poaching prevalence

32. Poaching is rife in some populations of saigas, for example in the pre-Caspian population. However there is also hope for improving the situation. In Mongolia, for example, a mixture of engagement with local people, improved anti-poaching and dedicated support from NGOs seems to have led to a major decline in wildlife poaching, which can be seen in the improved conservation status of the saiga population.

Engagement with people

33. Law enforcement needs to be complemented by education and awareness-raising (including for children), livelihoods-focussed interventions, and engagement with local people to change their view on poaching and reduce incentives for illegal killing. During the reporting period, there has been a lot of work done in all countries to engage with people. One innovative approach, from China, is that everyone going abroad gets a text message telling them not to buy illegal wildlife products. In the range states, NGOs have worked hard to engage with local people who may hunt, consume saiga meat, or ignore poaching, and to raise the awareness of children and their parents of the importance and conservation status of saigas.

Integrated approaches

34. The complexity of the issue of poaching and illegal trade requires an integrated approach which includes: monitoring of trade, poaching and markets (physical and online); awareness raising of consumers and hunters about both the laws and conservation status of the species using a range of approaches targeted to different groups; and cooperative work between agencies. Conservation planning needs to take place at an appropriate scale to ensure the conservation of a population, which may be transboundary or between provinces.