

RANGE STATE MEETING ON THE SINGLE SPECIES ACTION PLAN FOR THE HAWKSBILL TURTLE IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA AND THE WESTERN PACIFIC

Online
31 May - 2 June 2022



Contents

1. Opening of the Meeting 1

2. Adoption of the Agenda and Schedule 1

3. Key Findings of the IOSEA Hawksbill Assessment..... 1

4. Key Findings of the Pacific Hawksbill Assessment 2

5. Development of the Draft Single Species Action Plan 3

6. Country Presentations 4

7. Draft Single Species Action Plan 6

8. Governance of the Single Species Action Plan..... 8

9. Adoption of the SSAP 9

10. Next Meeting 9

11. Closing of the Meeting..... 9

Annex 1: List of Participants10

Annex 2: Agenda.....13

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Report of the Range State Meeting on the Single Species Action Plan for the Hawksbill Turtle in South-East Asia and the Western Pacific

1. Opening of the Meeting

1. Heidrun Frisch-Nwakanma (Secretariat) welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting that Melanie Virtue, Head of the CMS Aquatic Species Team, would be joining the meeting on the second day. She was pleased to be able to also welcome representatives of non-Parties to CMS and non-Signatories to the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU, as well as IGO and NGO observers.
2. The objective of the meeting was to finalize and adopt the draft Single Species Action Plan (SSAP), which everyone had already had opportunity to comment on in writing and discuss during the sub-regional workshops three weeks earlier. She was looking forward to the discussions.
3. She proposed that Colman O’Criodain (WWF), who had already served as chair in the sub-regional meetings and had long experience in CMS and CITES as well as the Irish government and was now with WWF, continue in his role as Chair of the meeting. This was agreed and the Chair opened the meeting.

2. Adoption of the Agenda and Schedule

4. Colman O’Criodain (Chair) drew attention to the [Online Meeting Protocol](#), as well as the [meeting page](#) which contained all information relevant for this meeting. A list of participants is contained in Annex 1.
5. He then asked whether there were any amendments to the [Provisional Annotated Agenda and Schedule](#). There were no interventions, so the agenda was adopted as presented (Annex 2).

3. Key Findings of the IOSEA Hawksbill Assessment

6. The Chair introduced this agenda item and referred participants to the [Assessment of the Conservation status of the Hawksbill turtle in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia Region](#) (IOSEA Hawksbill Assessment).
7. During his presentation, Mark Hamann (IOSEA Advisory Committee (AC)) explained that the IOSEA Hawksbill Assessment had been completed at the end of 2021 and released in 2022. It was a synopsis of the current/as recent as possible situation for hawksbill turtles, mostly since the year 2000, and covered the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia. In this presentation, in view of the coverage of the draft SSAP, he would focus on the South-East Asia component of the area covered in the IOSEA Hawksbill Assessment.
8. The key nesting areas were found to be: North Australia (declining stocks); West Australia (one of the largest stable stocks); Indonesia (a lot of nesting, most recent data came from ELNA); Gulf of Thailand (at least two stocks with other nesting groups, gradually increasing stock off depleted baselines); and Malaysia (varied data with some stocks showing a decline).

9. Identification of knowledge gaps:
 - There was very little information related to the biology and ecology of hawksbill turtles, especially on foraging sites;
 - Threats were often not well-known and rarely quantified;
 - There were gaps related to genetic connectivity, that once addressed, would help management units (MUs) and interventions such as managing use; and
 - There was a substantial knowledge gap on socio-economic aspects of use.
10. He outlined impacts and threats which included climate change, and plastic pollution and ingestion (although there was little data) in general across the region, and others differing across regions such as: continued and illegal use of turtles and eggs (mainly unquantified); domestic use and international trade of products (where the level of each differs across countries); bycatch in commercial and artisanal gill net fisheries (rarely quantified); and habitat loss and coastal development.
11. There was also positive news, including a decline in use and some significant recovery, for example in the Gulf of Thailand, Seychelles, and Chagos. However, current challenges included understanding and managing continued declines.
12. He concluded by noting some important existing and expanding initiatives across the region, mostly by communities and NGOs, but often supported by governments too, to try and understand more about turtles. Many were carried out by the scuba diving industry and through ecotourism, such as the NUSA Penida Turtle Project and Sea Turtle Research Expedition, Maldives.

4. Key Findings of the Pacific Hawksbill Assessment

13. Christine Madden Hof (WWF) presented an update on the [Assessment of the Conservation Status of the Hawksbill Turtle in the Western Pacific Region](#) (Western Pacific Hawksbill Assessment), noting it was geographically complementary to the IOSEA Hawksbill Assessment, and covered the remaining areas of focus of the draft SSAP.
14. She highlighted that the western Pacific Ocean region included 22 countries and four hawksbill turtle Regional Management Units (RMUs), namely the Southwest Pacific Ocean, West Central Pacific, South Central Pacific, and West Pacific. The Western Pacific Hawksbill Assessment presented a synopsis of current knowledge, including from the Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG) Oceania Reports, SPREP turtle action plan and the current extinction risk reviews, TREDIS and TurtleNet data. More than 60 reports had been reviewed.
15. The most comprehensive status assessment remained the Mortimer and Donnelly 2008 (International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)) report which identified that there had been >75 per cent population loss, with an estimated 4,800 nesting females remaining in the Pacific Ocean basin. Where further assessments had been done, there was also mostly concern over the hawksbill turtle population trends in, for example: Solomon Islands (increasing stocks), Republic of the Marshall Islands (declining stocks), most of Micronesia (declining stocks), Palau (likely declining), Guam (likely extirpated), and Vanuatu (likely declining). She hoped that the current SPREP extinction risk review would provide more knowledge.
16. Similarly to South East Asia, genetic information was quite poor, with large gaps which made it difficult to understand how to manage the populations.

17. There were limited studies on foraging grounds and migration, but it appeared that hawksbill turtles occurred and most likely migrated between almost every country in the Western Pacific region.
18. The top threats in the region had been identified as harvest and use, illegal trade (international and domestic) with trade buyers encroaching on the waters in the Western Pacific, bycatch, habitat destruction and alteration, plastic pollution, and climate change.
19. Major knowledge gaps included: population structure, including sex ratios, life history attributes - nesting population (genetic profiles, annual census, mortality, demographic parameters, temperature profiles and habitat use), life history attributes - non-reproductive populations (foraging areas, habitat use, diet, growth, age, survivorship, levels of direct harvest), and life history attributes - oceanic, post hatchling.
20. Ms Madden Hof invited further comments and input to the Western Pacific Hawksbill Assessment by the end of the month, after which it would be submitted to the CMS Secretariat for publication.
21. The Chair invited questions. Dave Mathias (Micronesia) asked when the last study was done in Micronesia with Ms Madden Hof responding that studies were done in 2001, 2005 and 2008. Records of nests were extremely rare, and it was estimated that there were only around ten females nesting per year.
22. Narelle Montgomery (Australia) asked why in the Solomon Islands nesting was increasing in the Arnavon Islands but decreasing outside the Arnavon Islands. Ms Madden Hof said other collaborators were concerned, but it was difficult to quantify as there was no long-term data. The TNC study identified poaching hot-spots surrounding the Arnavon's. For Tetepare for example, unpublished data indicated that the population was declining. WCS was working with the Solomon Islands government to review their National Action Plan (NAP) and had put together a synthesis and literature review to support this work which indicated that the population was quite small.

5. Development of the Draft Single Species Action Plan

23. The Chair introduced this agenda item, noting the previous reports on the IOSEA Hawksbill Assessment and the Western Pacific Hawksbill Assessment served as a background to the development of the draft SSAP.
24. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma outlined the history of the mandate to develop an action plan for the hawksbill turtle which was critically endangered globally according to the IUCN Red List and was listed on CMS Appendix 1. There had been growing concern specifically regarding the hawksbill turtle status in South-East Asia and the Western Pacific, communicated by experts and substantiated by, for example, a report presented to Signatory States of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU in 2014 and to CITES Parties in 2016, and now confirmed by the two assessments presented above. In 2017, the 12th Conference of the Parties (COP12) to CMS adopted CMS Decision 12.17, which called for the development of a regional action plan covering trade, use and other threats to hawksbill turtles. This mandate was also endorsed by the Signatory States of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU in 2019 at their 8th Meeting (MOS8) as a joint activity between the MOU and CMS. The mandate was subsequently renewed at the 13th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS (COP13) in 2020 in CMS Decision 13.70, with clear guidance that the SSAP should focus only on actions specifically needed for hawksbill turtles, rather than to try to cover recommendations that would address the needs of

marine turtle species more broadly. Hence, Decision 13.70 defined the scope as related only to use and trade as the most pressing issues for this species in the region to be covered.

25. She explained that the CMS Secretariat had initiated the work on the draft SSAP through drafting an overview document published as Inf.5 [Policy Review as Background to the Development of a SSAP for Hawksbill turtles in South-East Asia and the Adjacent Western Pacific](#). The goal of the Policy Review was to provide an overview of relevant commitments States in the region had already made, and to integrate the actions necessary to address trade and use at both the domestic and the international level. Table 1 of the Policy Review showed membership of States and relevant territories in relevant treaties and initiatives, and Table 2 provided a consolidation of actions relevant to hawksbill turtle use and trade foreseen under those instruments. This table had been used as a starting point for the drafting of the SSAP, which was focused on actions with the highest priority.
26. The draft SSAP had been circulated to Range States for written comments in April 2022, and the resulting revised version had been the basis for discussion at the three sub-regional workshop that had been held in mid-May 2022. Input received at these workshops had then been included in a further revised draft that had been circulated on 20 May 2022 and was the version this meeting would now be considering.
27. The Chair invited questions.
28. Ms Montgomery asked whether the document had been endorsed by the IOSEA AC. The Secretariat explained that, as this was not an IOSEA-led process, this step was not anticipated, but the document had been shared with the IOSEA AC Members for their comments, and they had been invited to participate throughout the process. Since many countries in the region were not CMS Parties or Signatories to the MOU, it was felt important to ensure that Range States had the opportunity to lead the process. At the same time, consultations had also included the IOSEA Illegal Trade Working Group, the SPREP and CITES Secretariats and the CMS Scientific Council. Furthermore, the document finalized by the Range States would be brought to the CMS Conference of the Parties (COP) and the Meeting of Signatories (MOS) for the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU for endorsement.
29. Hyeon Jeong Kim (CITES) explained there was a joint work plan with CMS to work on implementation of Decisions in relation to turtles, and this SSAP should also be brought to the attention of CITES Parties when finalized. The CMS and CITES Secretariats had also already discussed opportunities for joint outreach to Range States.
30. Faizah Ismail (Malaysia) asked what the implications for a country would be if they did not sign up to the SSAP at this meeting, and Ms Frisch-Nwakanma explained that, while any government representative with the appropriate credentials could commit their country at the end of this meeting, States could also join the process in the future. In response to a further question from Ms Ismail relating to addressing other threats to marine turtles, Ms Frisch-Nwakanma confirmed that the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU would continue to be the main mechanism to address marine turtle conservation in the region covered by the MOU.

6. Country Presentations

31. The Chair introduced this agenda item on country presentations. The presentations are available on the meeting website.

Australia

32. Karen Arthur (Australia) presented an update from Australia, acknowledging the cultural significance of the hawksbill turtle to many First Nations peoples across the region. Australia was a Party to CMS, CBD, and CITES with the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 giving effect to the obligations under these treaties. Hawksbill turtles were listed as Threatened and Migratory under the Act, therefore it was an offence to kill, take or move hawksbill turtles in a Commonwealth area. They were also protected in State and territory legislation as well as the Native Title Act 1993. In 2017, the Australian government, jointly with the Queensland and New South Wales governments, developed the Recovery Plan for Marine Turtles in Australia which covers six species of turtles and identifies threats and actions required to address threats.
33. For hawksbill turtles, three genetic stocks were recognized: North Queensland (declining); Northeast Arnhem Land (unknown); and Western Australia (large and likely stable). She also highlighted that turtles that nest across the Pacific were outside the jurisdiction of Australia but fed in Australian waters, and that some of the turtles that nested in Australian waters, foraged inside Australian waters. The Western Australian stock seemed to remain within Australian waters. Habitat protection mechanisms included designated marine protected areas (MPAs) and the Recovery Plan including habitat critical to survival of the species and Biologically Important Areas (BIAs). The Recovery Plan also identified key threats through a risk assessment, including: international take; marine debris; terrestrial predation; take of eggs; and climate change. She concluded by outlining management mechanisms through jurisdictional and local plans.

Cambodia

34. Chandara Tak (Cambodia) presented on the marine turtle-related activities in Cambodia, highlighting: bycatch surveys through fisher interviews in 2016-2018 (indicating 445 push nets and ray hooks bycatch) and 2018-2019 (indicating a total of 221), and in 2022 with a survey being prepared; sea turtle sightings, with an online database recording the capture and release from 2001-2022, with 140 sightings (43 hawksbill turtles, 12 tagged); regular nesting surveys through a network of volunteers during the September-April nesting season (36 hatchlings in 2022); an assessment on the scale and value of sea turtle product trade in Cambodia in 2021; and regular awareness-raising events through trips and signboards in sea turtle areas.
35. Mr Hamann asked whether there were any recent sightings of nesting close to the Viet Nam border. Mr Tak said they had found one nesting area for the Green turtle. Ouk Vibol (Cambodia) added further information on the legislation in Cambodia, noting that Cambodia classified turtles as 'endangered.' The Government of Cambodia had revised the Law on Fisheries which would be sent to the National Assembly for approval in 2022. It contained strong penalties on catching, selling and trade in illegal species such as marine turtles. They planned transboundary talks with Viet Nam on illegal trade.

Malaysia

36. Ms Ismail reported on hawksbill turtle conservation activities in Malaysia, noting there were four species of marine turtles landing in Malaysia and outlining the landing areas. The trend indicated a gradually increasing number of hawksbill turtles landing from 2000-2020. She highlighted the Initiative Conservation programmes, including: the Buy Back Turtle Eggs Scheme; the Turtle nesting Beach Lease Scheme; a total ban of trade in turtles/turtle eggs; adoption programmes and so on. The key legislation was the

Fisheries Act 1985 and individual State ordinances/ rules. She also highlighted activities, including: awareness-raising programmes and campaigns; the establishment of 29 hatcheries; a turtle nest adoption programme; and Turtle Excluder Device (TED) bycatch reduction programmes on a monsoon trawler on the East Coast Peninsula and on a shrimp trawler in Sabah.

Myanmar

37. Htun Thein (Myanmar) presented his update on key findings of the conservation and research activities for the hawksbill turtle in Myanmar. There were four species of marine turtles in Myanmar. He outlined the hawksbill turtle nesting sites, foraging areas and bycatch areas. Several activities were carried out on nesting beaches, including day and night patrols on nesting beaches with data collection, tagging of nesting turtles and tissue collection, nest relocation, and marine debris evaluation. 37 individuals had been tagged since 2007. Data from 2019 indicated nine nesting turtles in Oyster Island depending on the season. Conservation and research activities included: a bycatch questionnaire survey in 11 coastal villages (2021-2022); seven awareness-raising meetings with fishing community members and leaders (2020-2022), observing coastal fisheries, and awareness-raising signboards set up in fishing communities in coastal areas.
38. Achievements and successes included TED and awareness programme development by cooperating with the relevant departments; finding important data and information on nesting turtles and beaches and foraging areas; skill enhancement; improvement of turtle knowledge in fishing communities; and the setting up of the Myanmar Sea Turtle Working Group (MSTWG) involving focal department members, national and international experts, to promote the effectiveness of the Myanmar Sea Turtle Conservation Programme. He concluded by explaining that since 2021, it had not been possible to collect data in many areas in Myanmar as they were military zones.

Philippines

39. Rizza Salinas (Philippines) presented an update on hawksbill turtle conservation in the Philippines, highlighting that the hawksbill turtle was now 'critically endangered,' with penalties under the Republic Act 9147 (Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act). She shared hawksbill turtle data, including that the number of hatchlings released had increased (except in 2020 due to COVID). Through a Department Administrative Order, two sites had been declared as a critical habitat for hawksbill turtles. They had developed a Technical Bulletin providing management options and guidelines on the protection of marine turtle nesting sites as well as survey forms to identify and validate nesting grounds, habitat assessment and evaluation, identification of threats on sites, level of awareness on protection and conservation of marine turtles as well as monitoring forms. She also highlighted Adoption and Rescue Response Manuals for marine turtles and marine mammals, as well as the publication of Policy Memorandum Circular No 01 of 2020, outlining rules and regulations governing the conduct of marine wildlife tourism interactions in the Philippines. She concluded by noting upcoming activities as: the Shellbank project with WWF; the finalization of the Marine Turtle 10-year Conservation Action Plan of the Philippines; and development of a real-time App for people to record turtle encounters and incidents.

7. Draft Single Species Action Plan

40. The Secretariat introduced this item, explaining that the majority of the meeting time had been reserved for this detailed consideration of Doc.7, the [Draft Single Species Action Plan for the Hawksbill Turtle in South-East Asia and the Western Pacific Ocean Region](#).

Participants would have opportunity to discuss all parts of the document in detail, until country representatives were satisfied with the resulting text, which would then be proposed for adoption.

41. Ms Madden Hof presented an overview of the draft SSAP, explaining that they had reviewed all policies and mandates included in document Inf.5, and had identified the most urgent, high priority actions to assist governments in implementing their commitments in a cohesive way. Take and trade were issues at the interface of CITES and CMS, and there were linkages and overlap between these Conventions with respect to illegal trade, legal trade, community use and commercial use. The draft SSAP aimed to bring together the strengths of CITES and CMS, and provide the much-needed focused attention to integrate issues at domestic and international level.
42. The development of the document had included a review of the related legislation of 38 countries and territories in the region, which had identified the following key issues:
 - Legal provisions were not always tailored to hawksbill turtles
 - A prevalent lack of designation of the hawksbill turtle as a 'protected species'/further conservation status designation in national legislation
 - National laws bifurcate between use, take and trade
 - There was a wide range of penalties which may/may not aid in deterrence
43. The draft SSAP had three objectives, namely to review and, where necessary, improve legislation, policy, compliance and enforcement; to increase action and improve accountability to further monitor and report on hawksbill turtle take, use and trade nationally, and cooperate regionally to exchange data, share intelligence and strengthen collaborations; and to research and evaluate the level of impact that trade and fishery activity have on hawksbill turtle populations, and deliver on-ground implementation projects by 2027.
44. The draft SSAP contained 23 actions that were prioritised as 'essential,' 'high' and 'medium,' with timescales of immediate, short, medium, and ongoing. She stressed that these were not new actions as each one was already embedded in at least one existing policy framework and/or mandate. The draft also identified some of the potential delivery mechanisms and partners to help with speedy implementation of the actions foreseen.
45. Ms Montgomery asked about the inclusion of other areas beyond South-East Asia and the Western Pacific, and whether other topics besides take and trade has been included in the discussion. Ms Madden Hof explained that the mandate from the CMS COP had defined the geographic scope of the draft SSAP, and that this geographic area was seen as the epicentre for use and trade as a threat to hawksbill turtles. The Secretariat added that while the current mandate was for this region, if the Range States wished to expand to other areas in the future this could be possible. The draft SSAP had not yet been shared with countries outside the defined range, but there had been some participation from other areas including through the IOSEA Illegal Trade WG and the CMS Scientific Council. The Chair said it would be good to complete the draft SSAP and then see what the reactions from IOSEA Signatories and the CMS Parties were to this.
46. Participants then considered the draft SSAP.
47. On the Background Section, discussions included: how to reflect the reason for the mandated geographic scope being South-East Asia and the Western Pacific and note that other areas might benefit from a similar approach; the need to highlight coastal development and climate change as important threats alongside use and trade; and acknowledging the traditional and cultural importance of hawksbill turtles in the region,

in particular for indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs). A paragraph was added providing background to the process of developing the draft SSAP.

48. On Section 1 (Biological Assessment), discussions included linking to the Policy Mandate Table contained in the draft SSAP to describe distribution and referencing that hawksbill turtles nesting in Western Australia tended to forage in Western Australian jurisdiction.
49. On Section 2 (Threats from Anthropogenic Sources), discussions included how best to reflect the current situation in relation to hawksbill turtles in countries where there had not been a recent assessment, uncertainties around some available data, and the current review of the spatial boundaries of RMUs in the region (Sections 2.1 and 2.2). Participants also clarified that, as the scope of the draft SSAP had already been defined in the mandate at CMS COP13, the customary threat prioritization process had not been considered necessary, but that a prioritization of actions had been undertaken (Section 2.4).
50. On Section 3 (Policies and Legislation Relevant for Management), discussions included reference to the legislation of countries reflecting the IUCN Red List, as this was a complex issue at the national population level. It was acknowledged that the point was that there was a mismatch which needed to be addressed and it was agreed that the protection status should either reflect the Red List or the status of the population occurring within the jurisdiction of a country or territory.
51. On Section 4 (Framework for Action), the SSAP Goal was agreed as *“To address unsustainable use and trade of hawksbill turtles in the South-East Asia and Western Pacific Ocean region and build resilience in the populations.”* Discussion also focused on how to define the level of priority as well as realistic timeframes for each priority level. Participants spent considerable time reviewing and modifying the Actions and Results Table, including priority and timescale for actions.
52. It was agreed that Annex 1 (Overview of relevant national legislation by country relevant to the Hawksbill turtle) would be moved to a separate ‘Living Document’ to which States could provide updates as necessary.

8. Governance of the Single Species Action Plan

53. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma introduced Doc.8 [Suggestions for a Governance Structure to Support the Implementation of the SSAP](#), noting that, following the adoption of the draft SSAP, a mechanism would be needed to strengthen coordination and monitor implementation progress. The document proposed a lighter structure than that of MOUs or Agreements, which would nevertheless ensure that momentum was maintained. It was based on other Action Plans being successfully implemented within the CMS Family, such as the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA).
54. It was proposed that a Steering Group be created with one national government representative (Focal Point) and one national expert per Range State, with the option of including other international stakeholders as either members or observers, with a triennial cycle of review and meetings. This could be supported by National Working Groups consisting of National Focal Points, local stakeholders and scientists. The document also proposed targeted national reporting to monitor progress.
55. She then sought feedback on the document suggesting there be an agreement on process and timing for necessary nominations.

56. Ms Montgomery was concerned about manageability given the number of Range States potentially involved. The Secretariat suggested that the Steering Group could be split into sub-regions if it became unwieldy, and the Chair suggested there could also be separate legal/policy implementation and scientific bodies if needed.

9. Adoption of the SSAP

57. Melanie Virtue (Secretariat) informed the meeting that five States (Australia, Cambodia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Viet Nam) had submitted credentials allowing them to adopt the SSAP. Malaysia had submitted credentials that allowed them to participate but not adopt. Ms Montgomery explained that Australia would not be able to adopt the SSAP at this meeting due to internal issues, but would likely join the process in the near future.
58. The Chair announced, therefore, that the SSAP was adopted by four countries (Cambodia, Myanmar, Philippines and Viet Nam). Other Range States would be given opportunity to adopt the SSAP for their use in the coming months, and it would also be presented to the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS (COP14) and the 9th Meeting of the Signatory States (MOS9) of the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU for endorsement.
59. The final version of the SSAP as adopted can be found [here](#).

10. Next Meeting

60. Ms Frisch-Nwakanma said that the interval foreseen in the governance structure was for meetings to be held every three years. Given the urgency of many of the actions, she suggested that an earlier meeting be considered. For resource reasons, an online meeting might be advisable. She suggested the first meeting of the Steering Group should ideally aim to take place within the next few months to guide implementation. The Chair agreed, and after inviting comments, proposed an online meeting towards the end of 2022, or the beginning of 2023.
61. It was necessary that participating States would start forming the Steering Group by nominating candidates and communicating the SSAP to their governments. The Secretariat would also reach out to other countries who had not yet adopted the SSAP.
62. The Chair suggested that CMS COP14 in 2023 would also be a good opportunity for countries to self-organize getting together.

11. Closing of the Meeting

63. With the customary thanks, in particular to the Secretariat as well as Mr Hamann and Ms Madden Hof as experts on developing the SSAP, and the first four States to have adopted the Single Species Action Plan, the Chair closed the meeting.

List of Participants

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Agenda

1. Opening of the Meeting
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