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Agenda Item 19

REVISING THE FORMAT FOR NATIONAL REPORTS

(Prepared by the Secretariat)

Summary:

Resolution 11.2 on the *Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023* called for consideration of amendments to the format for National Reports, in respect of assessing implementation of the Strategic Plan and the scope for streamlining reporting processes to reduce reporting burdens.

This document reports on work done to address this issue in the context of the Strategic Plan and in the context of lessons emerging from analyses of the reports themselves. A draft Decision is provided which, if adopted, would mandate the Secretariat and the Standing Committee to produce a revised and streamlined format for use by Parties in future reporting cycles.

Assessment of progress in the implementation of the Strategic Plan through an enhanced national reporting process will generally contribute towards the implementation of all goals and targets of the Strategic Plan.

REVISING THE FORMAT FOR NATIONAL REPORTS

Background

1. In COP Resolution 11.2 on the *Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023*, the Parties to CMS requested the Secretariat to “consider amendments to the format for National Reports, where necessary, in respect of assessing implementation of the Strategic Plan and those indicators for which such reports are identified as a potentially important source of information, and the scope for streamlining existing reporting processes to reduce reporting burdens, and to submit any proposed amendments to the Standing Committee for its consideration and transmission to the 12th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties”.
2. The request in Resolution 11.2 therefore principally involves two issues: (i) supporting the assessment of the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023 (SPMS) and (ii) streamlining the reporting process as a whole. Work on the first of these issues advanced in 2016 with the support of the Strategic Plan Working Group (SPWG) and a generous voluntary funding contribution from the Government of Germany. The Secretariat has subsequently worked further on the second issue, drawing inter alia on suggestions provided by UNEP-WCMC following the COP11 reporting cycle, and on the analysis of national reports submitted by Parties to COP12, as discussed separately in document UNEP/CMS/COP12/Doc.19.1.
3. An integration of the two lines of thinking offers the basis for a single package of amendments that could be put forward for consideration and possible use for reporting to COP13, and in subsequent reporting cycles.
4. Based on the COP11 mandate referred to above, the overall aim of a revision of the format for National Reports is to generate information that will be useful for making assessments of the experience of CMS implementation and progress towards achieving the goals of the Strategic Plan, while also being as efficient as possible by ensuring that the reporting burden on Parties is limited to those items that are most meaningful. This should therefore produce:
 - the essential picture of Convention implementation;
 - sufficient information to allow learning/adaptation;
 - the essential picture of progress towards objectives in the Strategic Plan;
 - maximum efficiency and usefulness.

Amendments to align the National Report Format with the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species

5. In the course of the development by the SPWG of indicators for the targets in the SPMS, the proposals made in several cases involved one or more indicators to be based on information to be provided by Parties in their triennial national reports to COPs. In many of these cases a question or questions in the existing National Report Format (NRF) touch at least partly on the issue concerned; but in most cases, to align properly with the target and provide information that will help in assessing progress, some reformulation of the question(s) concerned would be required.
6. Accordingly, details of this cross-matching to the NRF, and suggestions for new or revised questions to address the Strategic Plan targets, have been included in successive drafts of the “Indicator Factsheets for the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species” developed in two post-COP SPWG meetings, with input also from discussion in the CMS Scientific Council and Standing Committee, and from a public consultation undertaken during April-August 2016. A further public consultation on a revised (third) version of the Factsheets as a whole took place from April-June 2017, and further revised (fourth) version has been provided in Information Document UNEP/CMS/COP12/Inf.26.

7. It is important to note that the proposals for NRF questions to underpin the SPMS indicators mostly do not consist of additional questions, but are instead modifications or replacements of the existing ones. In some places the proposed new question is shorter and less elaborate than the existing one, and more focused on what specifically needs to be known to assess the target; so already some useful streamlining has been identified. Overall in respect of the 16 targets, new questions are proposed for four of them, for two of them the proposed questions are slightly longer than the existing ones, for another two they are more or less the same, in seven cases they are shorter and simpler, and one question is proposed for complete deletion.
8. In 2014, the results of an analysis of national report information submitted to COP11 were presented in document UNEP/CMS/COP11/Doc.19.3, "Analysis and Synthesis of National Reports". The document made a general recommendation for the future to tailor all the NRF questions so that they would relate to specific objectives in the SPMS. The equivalent analysis presented to the present COP in document UNEP/CMS/COP12/Doc.19.1 reinforces the same conclusion, as does the document on implementation and monitoring of the SPMS, UNEP/CMS/COP12/Doc.15.
9. Within the CMS Family, AEWA has updated its NRF in a way that takes the AEWA Strategic Plan into account and includes cross-references to Strategic 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 NRF for Ramsar COP13 in 2018 in which there has been a systematic restructuring to group questions under each of the targets in the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024.
10. At its 45th meeting in November 2016, the CMS Standing Committee considered document UNEP/CMS/StC45/Doc.14 on the revision of the NRF. The document proposed that a revision of the NRF could be undertaken in two steps, with a first set of amendments (consisting mainly of integrating questions for the assessment of progress towards the targets of the Strategic Plan) being approved by the Standing Committee in time for use in the COP12 reporting cycle, and then a second set of amendments (taking into account the final outcomes of SPWG work on indicators and extending to a more in-depth revision of the format, including any appropriate streamlining) being prepared in time for consideration and approval by COP12. The specifics of the "first step" SPMS-related proposals (extracted from the Indicator Factsheets) were appended to the document.
11. After some discussion the Committee decided not to make changes in two steps, but instead to consider one overall revision at a later date. In the meantime for reporting to COP12 the existing (COP11) format has been used, with limited adjustments to take into account only the new Resolutions and species listings agreed by COP11.

Amendments to address other issues

12. The 2016 Standing Committee paper referred to above did not make any proposals about what the format itself should look like; nor did it address any of the reporting issues that relate to implementation of the Convention in respects other than those covered by the Strategic Plan, and/or those that will require reporting on an on-going basis beyond the Plan's time-horizon (2023).
13. A Supplementary Note was therefore provided to the Committee at the same time (document UNEP/CMS/StC45/Inf.5) on "Principles and general approach for pursuing possible further work on the National Report Format between StC45 and COP12". This drew upon comments provided by UNEP-WCMC following their analysis of the reports to COP11, and pointed out that, in line with paragraph 11 of Resolution 11.2, it would make sense to use the opportunity of any SPMS-related adjustments to the NRF to address at the same time any other updating improvements

that seemed desirable, 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.

14. Subsequently, the lessons learned from the analysis of the reports to COP12 have generated further specific recommendations for factual corrections and adjustments for improved consistency and clarity in the questions in the NRF (see document UNEP/CMS/COP12/Inf.27).
15. CMS meetings during 2016 of the Standing Committee, the SPWG and the Working Group on the Development of a Review Process under the Convention on Migratory Species generated some other observations on the NRF which should be taken into account. In particular, the Working Group on the Development of a Review Process under the Convention on Migratory Species considered national reports an important component when obtaining information for review (see document UNEP/CMS/COP12/Doc.22 for details).
16. A compilation of all of the suggestions arising from these various deliberations has been provided for information in document UNEP/CMS/COP12/Inf.27). The Secretariat has also given some initial consideration to the ways in which future questions in the NRF could be constructed to respond to the suggestions being made, as a potential starting-point for any revisions that might be considered in future.

Streamlining and synergies

17. A general concern has been noted regarding the complexity of the current format, and the desirability of streamlining it and making it more "user-friendly" (while not losing its ability to generate essential information in a consistent way across all Parties).
18. It may also be possible to identify similarities in the content of some of the questions being asked in the CMS process and in the national reporting processes of other MEAs, and to see whether there are ways in which countries which are Parties to multiple Conventions might be able to streamline their data-gathering and avoid duplication of effort. Reporting in CMS of course has to be directed specifically towards actions for the conservation of migratory species; but in the case of Ramsar, CITES and CBD for example there may be common interests with CMS where reporting approaches may at least helpfully converge to some extent. The Joint Work Plan for the CMS and Ramsar Conventions for 2015-2017 supported this idea with the inclusion of an item on streamlining and harmonization of reporting processes.
19. Suggestions have also been made regarding ways of reducing duplication of effort with the reporting processes under the individual instruments in the CMS Family.
20. In the CBD, the Parties in their Decision XIII/27 (COP13, December 2016) requested the finalization of a "resource manual" for the sixth round of CBD national reports, addressing for example guidance on common data sources, indicators and other relevant information provided by the Secretariats of other biodiversity-related Conventions. An analogous guidance resource for CMS Parties might be worth considering in future.

The way forward

21. Based on the work done to date and the ingredients described above, it is proposed to develop a revision of the NRF to be used by Parties in reporting to COP13 and in subsequent reporting cycles. The format would be developed intersessionally by the Secretariat for consideration and possible endorsement by the Standing Committee in time to be used for reporting to COP13.

22. Although the Parties are therefore not being requested to agree on specific changes to the format at the present meeting of the COP, a proposed Decision is appended to this document in which the mandate is given to the Secretariat and the Standing Committee to undertake work on this intersessionally. The draft Decision, if adopted, will also instruct that this work should follow certain key directions, including principally by seeking to achieve:

- an alignment between national reporting and the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species;
- subject to approval of the review process for CMS by the COP, a strengthening of the format as needed in relation to legally binding obligations of the Convention covered by the process;
- an overall streamlining and simplification of the reporting process, to reduce the burden on Parties; and
- where possible, synergies and harmonization with other reporting processes covering related issues.

Recommended actions

23. The Conference of the Parties is recommended to:

- a) take note of the work done to date to distil lessons learned concerning the use and effectiveness of the current CMS National Report Format;
- b) approve in principle the updating and improvement of the format in time for its use in reporting to COP13; and
- c) adopt the draft Decision contained in Annex 1 of the present document.

DRAFT DECISIONS

REVISING THE FORMAT FOR NATIONAL REPORTS

Directed to the Secretariat

12.AA The Secretariat shall develop a proposal to be submitted to the Standing Committee for a revision of the Format for the national reports to be submitted to the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties and subsequently, which shall as a minimum seek to achieve the following:

- i) addressing the recommendations emerging *inter alia* from the Strategic Plan Working Group concerning improved alignment of the National Report Format with the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023, and improving the ability of national reports to provide information on progress towards the targets contained in that Plan;
- ii) taking account of the lessons learned and recommendations arising from the analyses presented of the national reports submitted to COP11 and COP12 respectively;
- iii) taking account of the other suggestions for improvements to the National Report Format contained in document UNEP/CMS/COP12/Inf.27;
- iv) resulting in an overall shortening and simplification of the format;
- v) where feasible and to the extent appropriate, achieving improved synergies with the reporting processes of instruments within the CMS Family and with those of other Multilateral Environmental Agreements; and
- vi) considering as a possible approach the structure suggested in Annex 1 to this Decision.

Directed to the Standing Committee

12.BB The Standing Committee is requested to:

- a) consider and if appropriate endorse the proposals produced by the Secretariat further to Decision 12.AA above for a revision of the National Report Format, in time for any such revision to be issued to Parties for use by them in reporting to the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties and subsequently; and
- b) consider whether it may be desirable, subject to the availability of resources, to develop and produce guidance to accompany any revised National Report Format and/or any other related capacity-building support to assist Parties in compiling their reports according to the revised format.

ANNEX 1 TO THE DECISION

SUGGESTED POSSIBLE STRUCTURE FOR A REVISED CMS NATIONAL REPORT FORMAT

(SPMS = Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023)

- I** Administrative information
- II** Accession/ratification of CMS Agreements/MOUs
- III** Species on the Convention Appendices
- IV** Legal prohibition of the taking of Appendix I species
- V** Addressing the underlying causes of decline of migratory species by mainstreaming relevant conservation and sustainable use priorities across government and society
(*SPMS Goal 1; Targets 1-4*)
- VI** Awareness
(*SPMS Target 1*)
- VII** Mainstreaming migratory species in other sectors and processes
(*SPMS Target 2*)
- VIII** Governance, policy and legislative coherence
(*SPMS Target 3*)
- IX** Incentives
(*SPMS Target 4*)
- X** Reducing direct pressures on migratory species and their habitats
(*SPMS Goal 2; Targets 5-7*)
- XI** Sustainable production and consumption
(*SPMS Target 5*)
- XII** Threats and pressures affecting migratory species; including obstacles to migration
(*SPMS Targets 6-7*)
- XIII** Improving the conservation status of migratory species and the ecological connectivity and resilience of their habitats
(*SPMS Goal 3; Targets 8-10*)
- XIV** Conservation status of migratory species
(*SPMS Target 8*)

- XV** Cooperating to conserve migration systems
(SPMS Target 9)
- XVI** Area-based conservation measures
(SPMS Target 10)
- XVII** Enhancing the benefits to all from the favourable conservation status of migratory species
(SPMS Goal 4; Targets 11-12)
- XVIII** Ecosystem services
(SPMS Target 11)
- XIX** Safeguarding genetic diversity
(SPMS Target 12)
- XX** Enhancing implementation through participatory planning, knowledge management and capacity-building
(SPMS Goal 5; Targets 13-16)
- XXI** National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans
(SPMS Target 13)
- XXII** Traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities
(SPMS Target 14)
- XXIII** Knowledge, data and capacity-building
(SPMS Target 15)
- XXIV** Resource mobilization
(SPMS Target 16)