



**CONVENTION ON
MIGRATORY
SPECIES**

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Agenda Item 29.5

TOWARDS HARMONIZATION OF TAXONOMY AND NOMENCLATURE

(Prepared by the Scientific Council and the Secretariat)

Summary:

This document reports on progress to implement Decision 14.231 *Taxonomy and Nomenclature*. It proposes a new draft Decision for adoption and the deletion of Decision 14.231.

The draft Decision would support the monitoring of implementation of Goals 1 and 4 of the Samarkand Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2024–2032.

TOWARDS HARMONIZATION OF TAXONOMY AND NOMENCLATURE

Background

1. International efforts to conserve species can be significantly hampered if there is confusion over taxonomy. To address this issue, the Conference of the Parties to CMS, at its 14th meeting (COP14), adopted Decision 14.231 *Taxonomy and Nomenclature*, which reads as follows:

14.231 Directed to the Scientific Council:

The Scientific Council is requested, subject to the availability of external resources, to:

- a) *review the utility of the Catalogue of Life as a potential source for all taxonomic and nomenclatural information for CMS, including evaluating the processes of updating nomenclature within the Catalogue of Life; and*
- b) *liaise with taxonomic and/or nomenclatural advisors to other Multilateral Environmental Agreements on the practical challenges of extracting species lists for MEAs by a particular date for use as standard references by these MEAs.*

Harmonizing the taxonomy and nomenclature used by the biodiversity-related conventions

2. There has long been an ambition to harmonize the taxonomy and nomenclature in lists of species used by biodiversity-related conventions. The issue was first raised at the 6th meeting of the Liaison Group of the Biodiversity-related Conventions (Bonn, May 2008) and subsequently included in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)/CMS List of Joint Activities adopted by the 34th meeting of the CMS Standing Committee (Rome, November 2008).
3. In 2011, harmonization was supported by the Chairs of the Scientific Advisory Bodies of Biodiversity-related Conventions (4th meeting, Gland, Switzerland, 13 February 2011) and included in the CMS–CITES Joint Work Programme 2012–2014 adopted at the 38th meeting of the CMS Standing Committee (Bergen, November 2011).
4. Since 2017, the CMS COP-appointed Councillor for Birds has been working with taxonomists, including advisers to CITES, to develop institutional mechanisms that will provide high-quality advice on taxonomy and nomenclature to CMS, CITES and other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).
5. As part of this endeavour, the Checklist Governance Working Group was established in 2020, under the auspices of the International Union of Biological Sciences (IUBS). It is currently focused on preparing and evaluating metrics for the content and governance of taxonomic checklists, with the aim of establishing minimum standards and best practice guidelines for the preparation of checklists of species and higher taxa. By establishing scientific, technical and governance baselines, and evaluating checklists against these, checklists can be validated or shown where improvement is desirable. Checklists that meet the universal standards can be collated into an overarching framework to create a comprehensive standardized global checklist of species.
6. The vision is that such a global checklist would enable date-specific downloads and extracts in a format that is directly applicable to CMS requirements, and automated comparisons between the contents of the standardized global checklist at various dates (i.e., automatic lists of updates) as well as between the global checklist and other checklists (allowing, for example, for an instant comparison between an adopted but

now outdated CMS standard reference and the global checklist). Such a standardized global checklist could create a harmonized standard nomenclature that could be used by CMS and other MEAs, particularly CITES, as well as national governments, academic researchers and civil society.

7. After investigating multiple options and consulting widely, the Catalogue of Life was identified as the most comprehensive list of the world's species, with a capacity to provide free access to a single list and the potential to deliver time-fixed extracts of a type that is potentially suitable for MEAs.
8. However, before the Scientific Council can provide advice to the Parties on whether the Catalogue of Life is suitable for MEAs, and specifically for CMS, its capacity to deliver timely taxonomic and nomenclatural information needs to be reviewed.

Implementation of Decision 14.231 b) – Liaising with representatives of other multilateral environmental agreements

9. In accordance with Decision 14.231 b), the COP-appointed Councillor for birds liaised with the nomenclature specialists of the Plants and Animals Committees of CITES. Together, they identified the potential for the Catalogue of Life to meet the requirements of CITES. The CITES approach to the Catalogue of Life can be summarized as follows:
 - a. For CITES, the development of a standardized global checklist of species has long been an aspiration, as noted in CITES Decision 19.274. Progress on the implementation of CITES Decision 19.274 was subsequently reported in CITES documents PC26 Doc. 42.3 / AC32 Doc. 45.3 and PC27 Doc. 40.3 / AC33 Doc. 47.3. 85.
 - b. Paragraph 5 of CITES Resolution Conf. 12.11 (Rev. CITES CoP19) *Standard nomenclature* directs the CITES Secretariat, in close cooperation with the nomenclature specialists of the Plants and Animals Committees, to consider ways of harmonizing the taxonomy and nomenclature of species included in the provisions of biodiversity-related MEAs.
 - c. The nomenclature specialists of the CITES Plants Committee (PC) and Animals Committee (AC) have therefore been engaging with the Checklist Governance Working Group of the IUBS, as mandated by Decision 19.274. The CITES nomenclature specialists see the development of a global checklist as a long-term process and have proposed either integrating an ongoing mandate in CITES Resolution Conf. 12.11 (Rev. CoP19) *Standard nomenclature*, or a renewal of CITES Decision 19.274. Following discussions at the joint meeting of the CITES PC27 and CITES AC33 in July 2024, the Committees agreed to propose to the COP the renewal of Decision 19.274, as amended in the meeting (see summary records AC33 SR/PC27 SR). The draft amended Decision calls for an evaluation of the utility of the Catalogue of Life for CITES.
 - d. The CITES AC/PC are recommending to Parties at CITES COP20 that they support the CMS review process.
 - e. The needs and expectations of the CITES community are wider ranging than those of the CMS community because CITES concerns a more diverse range of organisms; CMS almost exclusively focuses on vertebrate animals. A review of the utility of the Catalogue of Life for the CMS community may therefore not necessarily cover all the needs of the CITES community.

Implementation of Decision 14.231(a) - Review of the Catalogue of Life

10. The 7th meeting of the Sessional Committee of the Scientific Council (ScC-SC7) mandated its 'Working Group on treatment of species included within aggregated families listed under Appendix II and potential taxa for listing' to also consider the suitability of the Catalogue of Life as a source of species lists for CMS. The Working Group discussed possible objectives, scope of work, deliverables and a timeline for the review, and acknowledged the usefulness of covering both CMS- and CITES-listed species in the review.

11. Given the request from the CITES AC/PC that the review be extended to consider the taxonomic and nomenclatural needs of CITES in addition to those of CMS, the Working Group recommends that the review of the Catalogue of Life is undertaken in the next triennium and that the review is expanded to include species groups of relevance to CITES as well as those of interest to CMS.

Recommended actions:

12. The COP is recommended to:
 - a) adopt the draft Decision contained in the Annex of this document, and
 - b) delete Decision 14.231.

ANNEX

DRAFT DECISION

TOWARDS HARMONIZATION OF TAXONOMY AND NOMENCLATURE

Directed to the Scientific Council

- 15.AA The Scientific Council is requested, subject to the availability of external resources, to:
- a) review the utility of the Catalogue of Life as a potential harmonized repository for taxonomic and nomenclatural information, including evaluating the processes for updating nomenclature within the Catalogue of Life.