

**6th Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the
CMS Scientific Council (ScC-SC6)**

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EVALUATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

(Prepared by the Chair of the Scientific Council and the Secretariat)

Summary:

Resolution 12.4 calls for an evaluation of the results of the restructuring of the Scientific Council with a view to reviewing or confirming it during COP14.

This document provides a summary of the feedback received from an online survey on the effectiveness of the restructuring and highlights common themes for the Sessional Committee to consider.

EVALUATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

Background

1. The establishment of a Scientific Council to provide advice on scientific matters to other CMS bodies and CMS Parties was set out in Article VIII of the Convention. The Scientific Council was established by the 1st meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP1) in 1985.
2. Each Party is entitled to appoint a qualified expert as a member of the Scientific Council (Party-appointed Councillors). In addition, the Conference of the Parties can appoint other experts to cover fields of particular interest to the Convention (COP-appointed Councillors). With the increase in the number of Parties to the Convention, the number of members of the Scientific Council has grown accordingly.
3. The 'Future Shape' process undertaken during the triennium 2009-2011, identified the restructuring of the Scientific Council as one of 16 target activities for CMS. COP11 (2014), through Resolution 11.4, agreed to implement institutional and organizational changes to the Scientific Council. In particular, while reaffirming that the Scientific Council will continue to be composed of members appointed by individual Parties and members appointed by the Conference of the Parties, it decided that, for each intersessional period between two consecutive meetings of the Conference of the Parties, a representative selection of the membership of the Scientific Council, to be named the **Sessional Committee** of the Scientific Council (ScC-SC), should be identified, to be appointed at each ordinary meeting of the COP. The ScC-SC is composed of:
 - (a) nine COP-appointed Councillors with expertise in taxonomic and thematic issues; and
 - (b) fifteen Party-appointed Councillors, three from each of the Standing Committee's geographic regions: Africa, Asia, Europe, Oceania, and South and Central America and the Caribbean.
4. The ScC-SC is primarily responsible for the implementation of the mandate assigned to the Scientific Council by COP for the intersessional period. All outputs of the ScC-SC are considered outputs of the Scientific Council. Since its establishment in 2016, the ScC-SC has met in place of the full Scientific Council. This restructuring significantly reduced the number of Party-appointed Councillors required to attend Scientific Council meetings – from potentially 133 (equivalent to the total number of Parties) down to 15.
5. When COP11 agreed to the changes, it also decided to evaluate the results of the restructuring during COP14, with a view to reviewing or confirming it ([Resolution 12.4](#) paragraph 12).

Survey to evaluate the results of the restructuring of the Scientific Council

6. To support such an evaluation, the Chair of the Scientific Council and the Secretariat conducted an online survey on the effectiveness of the restructuring among all members of the Scientific Council and the members of the Standing Committee. The questionnaire used to conduct the survey is annexed to this document.
7. The survey was conducted between December 2022 and February 2023. A total of 16 replies were received. All replies were anonymous. The next section of this document provides a summary of the feedback received and highlights common themes arising from the responses.

Analysis of survey results

8. **Meeting the aims for which the ScC-SC was established:** The majority of survey respondents considered that the ScC-SC had met the aims envisaged when the restructuring was agreed, while a small number of respondents felt that the aims had only been partially met. Suggested improvements included increasing the number of Party-appointed Councillors for each region from three to four to allow for easier rotation of members; placing a stronger focus on completing action items; and consulting with all Scientific Councillors within regions prior to and following ScC-SC meetings.
9. **Composition of the ScC-SC:** Most survey respondents considered that the composition of the ScC-SC provided appropriate capacity to progress the work programmes during the intersessional period, whereas some respondents felt that the composition was not appropriate. Suggested improvements included having additional (in-person) meetings to strengthen the capacity of the ScC-SC. It was also noted that additional Secretariat support, potentially both financial and organizational, was needed to successfully implement the work programme as many activities involved reaching out to and/or hiring external experts.
10. **Engagement of the ScC-SC during the intersessional period:** The prevailing feeling among respondents was that the reduced membership of the Sessional Committee had actually led to a stronger engagement by the members in intersessional work, and more focused and inclusive discussions. Opposing views were also expressed though, with some respondents feeling that the establishment of the ScC-SC had in fact led to most councillors not members of the ScC-SC to not attend meetings and not get involved in ScC-SC workstreams.
11. **Return to full Scientific Council meetings:** The majority of survey respondents were not supportive of returning to full Scientific Council meetings, since these could lead to a dilution of focus and efficiency. It was also noted that returning to full Scientific Council meetings could lead to many Councillors assuming others would undertake the work, given the amount of people in attendance. Opposing views, supporting a return to full Scientific Council meetings, were also expressed though. Some respondent saw scope for promoting greater engagement of Scientific Councillors who are not on the ScC-SC and bringing in more external experts, as needed.
12. **Engagement of regional representatives:** While it was noted that the situation differed among regions, Party-appointed ScC-SC members were generally perceived to only partially engage with other Scientific Council members in their respective region, both prior to and following the conclusion of meetings, with the majority noting that increased engagement was desirable. The opinion was expressed that Party-appointed ScC-SC members should be able to objectively represent a regional view during meetings. It was suggested that ScC-SC members should address this shortcoming by seeking feedback from regional representatives during and outside of ScC-SC meetings.
13. **Involvement by other Councillors in regional matters:** Survey respondents noted that Party-appointed ScC-SC members should provide regular updates to other Scientific Council members in their region, both before and after ScC-SC meetings. It was suggested that the Secretariat facilitate this by providing clear reporting guidelines. Further suggestions were that the Secretariat could share an email list of all Scientific Councillors and ScC-SC members, grouped into regions for ease of communication. Some survey respondents also noted that Party-appointed Councillors might not necessarily represent differing views and stressed the need for impartiality.
14. **Suitability of the nine COP-appointed Councillor subject areas:** Overall, survey respondents were satisfied with the current choice of the subject areas, noting that some subject areas might be over-represented by the experts appointed, and others might be receiving less attention than needed. It was noted that Party-appointed members should

provide additional engagement and support in underrepresented areas. Regular communication between COP-appointed Councillors and Party-appointed ScC-SC members was also stressed, to ensure that all ScC-SC members were aware of work under way and achievements in the intersessional period. The regular review of COP-appointed Councillor subject areas every two COP cycles was noted as important, to ensure the ongoing relevance and applicability of the subject areas in future.

15. **Critical working groups and task forces:** The majority of survey respondents noted that all working groups and task forces should be subject to regular review, confirmed at the ScC-SC before COP and agreed at COP, if required. Survey respondents stressed that less active working groups require a thorough revision of their work programmes and terms of reference. Instituting a regular review of work achieved and the ongoing needs of each working group and task force at each COP cycle would assist.
16. **Benefits in the creation and operation of the ScC-SC:** Survey respondents noted that the ScC-SC allowed for greater engagement, proactivity and transparency in comparison to full Scientific Council meetings. Additional benefits mentioned were the reduction in meeting participants and therefore in operating costs. It was also noted that the tasks directed at the ScC-SC should be discussed and agreed at each COP. Areas that needed improvement were the consultation process for Party-appointed Councillors within their designated regions, as well as regular communication of the work being undertaken by the ScC-SC with the full Scientific Council.
17. **Constraints created by moving from full Scientific Council meetings to ScC-SC meetings:** Respondents had split opinions about tensions between the science/policy interface, and how various viewpoints could impact discussions. A few survey respondents noted a lack of strategic vision to address issues raised at COP, as well as a lack of adequate regional consultations.
18. **Preference for full Scientific Council or ScC-SC:** The majority of respondents believed that the Sessional Committee served the Convention better than meetings of the full Scientific Council. Suggested improvements to the Sessional Committee included increasing the number of (virtual) meetings; providing additional Secretariat support to facilitate various work streams; promoting the involvement of external scientific experts in specific discussions and reducing the number of NGO and Party representatives; and increasing the frequency of communication across the Scientific Council, the Secretariat and other stakeholders. It was also suggested to establish a complete timetable of scheduled intersessional meetings for different working groups and task forces to enable Sessional Committee members and other Scientific Councillors to plan their engagement.
19. **Use of online meetings:** The vast majority of survey respondents agreed that online meetings should be utilized in future during the intersessional period to increase progression of items and outputs. These meetings should consider different time zones and interests and be short and focused.

Common themes identified in the surveys

20. A number of common themes emerged from the feedback in terms of recommendations to further improve the effectiveness of current arrangements:
 - Enhancing the engagement and consultation of Scientific Councillors who are not members of the Sessional Committee by ScC-SC Party-appointed regional representatives prior to and following the conclusion of meetings.
 - Conducting regular reviews (i.e., each COP cycle) of the working groups and task forces established under the Sessional Committee to determine progress and ongoing needs.
 - Increasing the number of virtual intersessional meetings on specific topics. This could be facilitated by timetabling items requiring further focus from each work stream across the

period between each face-to-face Sessional Committee meeting.

- Providing additional Secretariat support to assist Scientific Councillors and working groups/task forces to successfully implement work programmes.
- Increasing communication between Sessional Committee members, Scientific Councillors and the Secretariat between meetings to highlight ongoing work and opportunities for engagement.

Discussion and analysis

21. While it may not be possible to draw definite conclusions from the feedback from the survey due to the relatively limited number of respondents, the points summarized above can provide a basis for discussion for the Sessional Committee at this meeting. It is suggested that the meeting consider whether the restructuring of the Scientific Council into the Sessional Committee has enhanced scientific support to the Convention, whether members support the ongoing operation of the Sessional Committee, and if there are any improvements that should be emphasized.

Recommended actions

22. The Sessional Committee is recommended to:
 - a) consider the results of the survey on the effectiveness of the restructuring of the Scientific Council summarized in this document; and
 - b) provide recommendations on any appropriate improvements to further the effectiveness of the Scientific Council.

SURVEY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE RESTRUCTURE OF THE CMS SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

- Has the Sessional Committee met the aims envisaged when the restructuring was agreed (see [Resolution 12.4](#)), including but not limited to:
 - a balanced scientific representation of expertise in taxonomic and cross-cutting thematic areas;
 - a selection of individuals with a broad understanding of key scientific issues and concrete experience in translating science into policy in their regions; and
 - coverage of the predicted scientific expertise needed by the Convention for the next triennium

Yes / Partially / No

Please provide details in the text box below: [Text Box]

- Does the composition of Sessional Committee provide appropriate capacity to progress the work program during the intersessional period?

Yes / Partially / No

Please provide details in the text box below: [Text Box]

- How has the restructure of the Scientific Council into the Sessional Committee helped in achieving greater engagement during the intersessional period?
[Text Box]
- Would returning to full Scientific Council meetings provide greater intersessional capacity?
[Text Box]

- Have the regional representatives been effective in the following areas:

- Engaging with other Scientific Council members in the region, both prior to and following conclusion of meetings;

Yes / Partially / No

Please provide details in the text box below: [Text Box]

- Representing a regional view during relevant discussions during meetings;

Yes / Partially / No

Please provide details in the text box below: [Text Box]

- Been effective in facilitating regional involvement in work during the intersessional period.

Yes / Partially / No

Please provide details: [Text Box]

- If appropriate, identify any guidance that would benefit regional representatives to effectively facilitate greater involvement by other councillors.

[Text Box]

- Have the nine COP-Appointed Councillor subject areas been the correct subject areas required of the Convention, particularly since COP13 when subject areas were reconfirmed?

Yes / Partially / No

Please provide details: [Text Box]

- There are currently the following working groups and task forces operating under the mandate of Scientific Council/Sessional Committee (a full list was provided with the questionnaire):

- Which ones do you view as critical to progressing mandated Sessional Committee workstreams?

[Text Box]

- What have been in your view the main benefits of the creation and operation of the Sessional Committee?

[Text Box]

- Can you identify any constraints that have been created by moving from convening full Scientific Council meetings to Sessional Committee meetings?

Yes / Partially / No

Please provide details: [Text Box]

- On balance, which formulation (either full Scientific Council or Sessional Committee) do you believe serves the Convention better?

[Full Scientific Council] [Sessional Committee]

- If Sessional Committee, are there any improvements to the way it is structured or operates that could be made?

[Text Box]

- Do you believe the use of online meetings, particularly those organised to progress specific streams of work, should be utilised in future?

Yes / No

Please provide details: [Text Box]