

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES  
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



Sixty-second meeting of the Standing Committee  
Geneva (Switzerland), 23-27 July 2012

Administrative matters

Meetings of the Conference of the Parties

STRUCTURE AND LENGTH OF FUTURE MEETINGS

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.

Background

2. At the 61st meeting of the Standing Committee (SC61, Geneva, August 2011), the Secretariat submitted document SC61 Doc. 11.1, to seek the views of the Standing Committee on the possibility of reducing the length of future meetings of the Conference of the Parties. The summary record of the meeting records the following summary and decision:

*The Secretariat introduced document SC61 Doc. 11.1, which was welcomed as an initiative. Some support was expressed for the option of reducing the second working week of meetings of the Conference of the Parties (CoPs) to four days, but there was no support to shorten the two-day break in the middle of the meetings. Some speakers suggested the need to explore other ways of reducing the length and cost of CoPs, such as: increasing the length of all working sessions by 30 minutes; reducing the length of the pre-CoP Standing Committee meeting and holding it on the day of the opening ceremony of the CoP; making greater use of 'breakout' sessions and holding working groups in parallel to the official CoP sessions; and extending the period between CoPs to four years.*

*The Committee instructed the Secretariat to prepare a further document on this subject for consideration at SC62, taking account of the comments made during the discussion. The Committee noted that the Secretariat would invite further comments through the forum section of the CITES website.*

3. On 2 February 2012, the Secretariat requested the views of all Parties through the Management Authorities Forum on the CITES website, especially on: the desirability or necessity to reduce the length of meetings of the Conference of the Parties (and of the permanent committees); and possible ways of reducing the length of meetings.
4. At the time of writing (end of April 2012), responses had been received only from the Member States of the European Union (EU) and New Zealand. The comments received can be summarized as follows:
  - Four years between CoPs:  
The EU and New Zealand did not support this idea as it would lead to longer agendas and reduce the ability of Parties to improve the effectiveness of CITES through CoPs.
  - Opening ceremony:  
The EU suggested that this be limited to allow working sessions to start on the first day.
  - Increasing the length of sessions by 30 minutes:  
The EU and New Zealand supported this idea, linked to the reduction of the second week to four days.

- Scheduling:  
New Zealand also provided, through the forum, a proposed CoP schedule based on an analysis of the number of hours needed for the committees and the plenary sessions.
- Working groups (or 'breakout groups'):  
New Zealand noted that it would be preferable if these did not meet at the same time as plenary or committee sessions, because small delegations would be disadvantaged in their ability to participate in simultaneous sessions.

#### Discussion

5. It seems that there is general support for the idea of reducing the overall length of meetings of the Conference of the Parties by one day, restricting the second week to four days. Various ways have been suggested to achieve this. Unsurprisingly, in essence, these involve:
  - a) starting working sessions on the first day;
  - b) extending the working hours to finish later each day; and
  - c) doing more work in working groups.
6. If the Standing Committee agrees, points a) and b) above can already be addressed in the provisional working programme for the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP16). (This question can be discussed under that agenda item.)
7. Point c) under paragraph 5 would need to be taken into account by the Chair of CoP16 and by the Chairs of Committee I and Committee II in the running of their meetings, under the guidance of the Bureau. As the entire Standing Committee forms the core of the Bureau, it will be their responsibility to ensure that the meeting is running to time and to advise the Chairs on the different ways to achieve this.
8. The draft provisional working programme for CoP16 is presented in document SC62 Doc. 10.2.3, and is designed with four working days in the second week, taking account of the points in paragraphs 5. a) and b) above.

#### Recommendation

9. The Standing Committee is therefore invited to note the present document.