

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



Intersessional work of the Standing Committee
2020-2021

74th meeting of the Standing Committee:
Risk assessment of a face-to-face meeting

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.

Background

2. Rule 8.2 of the Standing Committee's Rules of Procedure states that the time and place of meetings shall be determined by the Chair in consultation with the Secretariat in accordance with any instructions provided by the Conference of the Parties.
3. At the 73rd meeting of the Standing Committee (SC73, online, May 2021), France offered to look into hosting the 74th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC74), noting that, depending on the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic, the size of delegations might have to be limited in order to enforce social distancing measures. The Standing Committee welcomed this offer and requested the Secretariat to pursue scenario 2 of document [SC73 Doc. 28](#). Should a face-to-face meeting not be possible, the Committee also requested the Secretariat to develop plans for an online meeting with adjusted modalities, including an extended meeting period, the early submission of documents for comments and the possibility of establishing in-session working groups.
4. Following further discussions with France and after consultation with the Standing Committee Chair, the Secretariat announced in Notification to the Parties [No. 2021/056](#) of 23 September 2021 that the government of France had confirmed its offer to host SC74 and that the meeting was expected to be held in the first half of March 2022. A Secretariat delegation held a site visit to the intended venue for SC74 on 20 October 2021 and since then intensive discussions have taken place between the French authorities and the Secretariat. A full logistical plan has been agreed and a final version of the Host Country Agreement has been drafted and is ready for signature. The venue has limited capacity and Members and Alternate Members will have noted from Notification to the Parties [No. 2021/069](#) that Parties are encouraged to minimize the size of their delegation to the extent possible and that each observer organization may nominate a maximum of two participants to represent them at the meeting. Each Member, Party and observer organization that wishes to attend the meeting will be able to be seated at a microphone, but based on the number of participants at recent Committee meetings it may well be that seating will be more limited than stated in Rule 9 of the Committee's Rules of Procedure.
5. In Notification to the Parties [No. 2021/069](#) of 18 November 2021, the dates of the meeting were tentatively scheduled for 7-11 March 2022 and details of registration and document submission for the meeting were announced.
6. In an email on 17 October 2021, the Chair of the Standing Committee advised Members and Alternate Members that the Secretariat would organize an informal briefing for the Standing Committee in mid-December 2021 to review the prospects for a face-to-face meeting in France in March 2022 and the options for an online meeting if it is not possible to meet face-to-face. In a further email of 18 October 2021, the Chair confirmed that this briefing would be held on 14 December 2021 and its purpose would be to take stock of the situation in order to come to a conclusion on the modalities for SC74.

Prospects for face-to-face meeting in Lyon, France, 7-11 March 2022

7. In May 2021, in document SC73 Doc. 28, the Secretariat detailed a risk assessment for various meeting scenarios for SC74 including a face-to-face meeting of SC74. The main downside risk is related to public health. In order to reappraise the risks related to public health, the Secretariat has been in close contact with the French authorities over the sanitary measures applied in the current health context, including the requirements for entry into France.
8. France prepared a document detailing entry requirements currently in force. On 11 November 2021, the Secretariat sent this to all Members and alternate Members of the Committee. Members and alternates were requested to review these requirements and advise if they would be available to travel to France if these sanitary regulations remained unchanged in March 2022. Additionally, Members and alternates Members were asked if there were any other related, current or anticipated, impediment to their participation at a face-to-face meeting in France, including, for instance, a ban on government officials travelling abroad or on returning from France (or any likely transit country). Replies were received between 11 November and 8 December.
9. Responses were received from 30 Members and Alternate Members of the Committee as follows:

Representative	Alternate	Expect to be able to attend	Expect not to be able to attend
Africa			
Congo	Chad	Chad (29/11/21), Congo (29/11/21)	
Ethiopia	Kenya	Kenya (29/11/21)	Ethiopia (17/11/21)
Namibia	Madagascar	Madagascar (23/11/21)	Namibia (01/12/21)
Morocco	Senegal	Senegal (30/11/21)	Morocco (22/11/21)
Asia			
China	Japan	Japan (26/11/21)	China (16/11/21)
Kuwait	Republic of Korea	Kuwait (25/11/21), Republic of Korea (01/12/21)	
Indonesia	Nepal		Indonesia (22/11/21), Nepal (08/12/21)
Central and South America and the Caribbean			
Bahamas	<i>Dominican Republic</i>	Bahamas (22/11/21)	
Honduras	Nicaragua	Nicaragua (25/11/21), Honduras (01/12/21)	
Peru	<i>Brazil</i>	Peru (29/11/21)	
Europe			
Poland	Ireland	Poland (23/11/21), Ireland (23/11/21)	
Israel	<i>Belarus</i>	Israel (17/11/21)	
Belgium	Spain	Belgium (17/11/21), Spain (23/11/21)	
Russian Federation	Georgia	Georgia (11/11/21)	Russian Federation (30/11/21)
North America			
Canada	United States of America	Canada (15/11/21), United States of America (23/11/21)	
Oceania			

Representative	Alternate	Expect to be able to attend	Expect <u>not</u> to be able to attend
New Zealand	Australia	New Zealand (30/11/21), Australia (22/11/21)	
Depositary Government			
Switzerland		Switzerland (11/11/21)	
Next host country			
Panama		Panama (29/11/21)	

10. For the Alternate Members Belarus, Brazil and the Dominican Republic, it was not possible to obtain a reply or a clear response. Under Rule 13 of the Committee's Rules of Procedure, a quorum for a meeting consists of Representatives or Alternative Representatives of seven regional Members from at least four regions. On the basis of the replies received, a quorum could be achieved for face-to-face meeting under current circumstances. The meeting could be streamed in English, French and Spanish on the CITES YouTube Channels.
11. Whilst public health circumstances and responses to them vary between Parties, the situation in the proposed host country of France has a particular bearing on the meeting. It should be noted that France successfully hosted the 8th IUCN World Conservation Congress between 3-10 September 2021 with [nearly 6,000 registered participants on site](#). Currently, cases of COVID-19 are rising in France; however, there is a relatively high vaccination rate in the general population and occupancy of hospital intensive care beds is rising more slowly than infections. . Given recent events, such as the emergence of the Omicron variant, it is clear that nevertheless the situation can change rapidly. Even if it is decided to proceed with a face-to-face meeting, the Standing Committee Chair, host country and Secretariat will need to keep the situation under careful review in case critical changes occur which risk the meeting being inquorate or the health and safety of participants being compromised.
12. The Secretariat has reappraised the risks of holding a face-to-face meeting of SC74, all related to public health, and the results are shown in Table 1 in the Annex to the present document. The Secretariat has also updated the risk assessment with holding SC74 in an online format in document SC73 Doc. 28. Table 2 in the Annex to the present document reappraises these risks at the present time.

Options for an online meeting if a face-to-face meeting is not possible

13. The Standing Committee, at its 73rd meeting, requested the Secretariat to develop plans for an online meeting with adjusted modalities, including an extended meeting period, the early submission of documents for comments and the possibility of establishing in-session working groups, should a face-to-face meeting not be possible. It should be noted that there is currently no provision in the Secretariat budget for hosting an online meeting in 2022. It is likely that savings could be rolled from the 2021 budget to that for 2022, but this would require a recommendation from the Finance and Budget Subcommittee and a decision of the Standing Committee.
14. In order to prepare for such an eventuality and to gather lessons learned, the Secretariat sent a survey to participants in SC73, the 31st meeting of the Animals Committee (AC31) and the 25th meeting of the Plants Committee (PC25). The detailed results can be found in information document SC2021 Inf. 2 [\[https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/2020-2021/Inf/E-SC2021-Inf-02.pdf\]](https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/2020-2021/Inf/E-SC2021-Inf-02.pdf) on intersessional work of the Standing Committee webpage of the CITES website. Overall, over 60% respondents were somewhat or very satisfied with the online proceedings of the 2021 Committee meetings (SC73: 75.16%; AC31: 72.3%; PC25: 60.3%). The Secretariat has drawn on the results of that survey to prepare options for an online meeting.
15. To facilitate planning for Parties and the Secretariat, an online meeting would have the same start date as a face-to-face meeting, i.e. 7 March 2022. This would mean that the deadlines for document submission and for registration, as detailed in Notification to the Parties No. 2021/069, would stay the same. Due to

differences in time zones and to the constraints of the online format, each session should only last 3 hours per day.¹

16. The Standing Committee would need to meet at least 14 days for 3 hours per day to cover the provisional agenda of its 74th meeting. This corresponds to the 42 hours during which the Standing Committee would convene during a one-week face-to-face meeting with evening sessions. An online meeting extended over a longer period of time would need to avoid any overlap with the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity which is scheduled from 25 April to 8 May 2022. In an online format, a three-week session with meetings every day could be organized (from 7 to 25 March), followed by a two-week break to organize in-session working groups.² The Standing Committee would then reconvene for a final week from 11 to 14 April to review reports of working groups and conclude its business.

7 to 25 March 2022: 3-hour daily session

28 March to 8 April 2022: 2 weeks break for in-session working groups

11 to 14 April 2022 3-hour daily session

17. The expected meeting hours would be from 12.30pm to 3.30pm (CET/Geneva time), although this could be reviewed to lessen the burden of its unsocial timing for some Parties. For compliance cases, the timing of the session may need to change to ensure that the session takes place during the core working hours of the concerned Party. As in the case of AC31, PC25 and SC73, the proceedings could be streamed in English, French and Spanish on the CITES YouTube Channels.³
18. Drawing on the experience of AC31 and PC25, the constraints of an online format are such that fewer agenda items can be considered within 3 hours compared to a face-to-face format. For this reason, contingency measures could be adopted to streamline consideration of the agenda items. During the beginning three-week session, the agenda items could be organized by themes: strategic matters, compliance, regulation of trade, reports from the Animals Committee, reports from the Plants Committee, agenda items for noting, etc. If the Committee is unable to reach a conclusion, these agenda items could be suspended and then opened again during the last week of the meeting, allowing for the convening of in-session working groups where necessary.
19. The modalities outlined above represent a significant commitment on the part of Standing Committee Members and observers. If required, the Secretariat could prepare suggestions for further ways to expedite the proceedings *inter alia* by limiting the introduction of the agenda items and by considering together all the agenda items that are likely to be uncontested or are simply for noting. Since time for interventions will likely be limited, the Secretariat could also consider dedicating a section on the CITES website linking to position statements by observer organizations.

Concluding comments

20. In order to place contracts for services, facilities and equipment, the potential host country (France) needs to know well in advance if a decision to hold a face-to-face meeting of the Standing Committee is confirmed, recognizing that circumstances may yet change before 7 March 2022. Advanced notice also allows the Standing Committee Members, Observer Parties and the Secretariat to plan for any contingency measures if a face-to-face meeting is not to be held. The present online briefing should permit the Committee Chair to promptly decide on the modalities for the upcoming 74th meeting, taking into consideration the views expressed by the Members. Notification to the Parties No. 2021/069 of 18 November 2021 advised Members and observers that such a decision will be taken before the end of the year.
21. The Secretariat trusts that the foregoing information will assist the Committee Members and Alternates to reflect on the best course of action and provide its views to the Committee Chair. The Secretariat stands ready to provide any further information that may be required and, through the Secretary-General, will provide its own view during the debate.

¹ In the survey on past online meetings, 65% of respondents concurred that 3 hours was the right amount of time for a daily session.

² For AC and PC, 76% of respondents considered that a 2-week break was the right amount of time for organizing, holding and concluding the working groups.

³ In the survey, 58% of respondents found the YouTube streaming of the meetings very or extremely useful.

Table 1. Risk assessment for a face-to-face meeting of SC74.

Description	Likelihood in March 2022	Impact	Overall risk rating	Adaptation response
<p>SC Members and Alternates are not able to travel to the meeting, resulting in a lack of quorum, due to added restrictions including quarantine, COVID health passes, and others measures.</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Twenty-two Members and Alternates (69%) from six regions stated that they would be able to travel to France if sanitary measures remain unchanged and a quorum could be achieved in these circumstances (see paragraph 9). However, this could change if travel due to the pandemic is further restricted before March 2022.</p> <p>A review of the red, scarlet (recently added due to the Omicron variant), orange and green classification of countries with different entry requirements, including isolation and COVID health passes, will be undertaken to assess the ability of Members and Alternates to enter the host country.</p> <p>By 1 February 2022 If further travel restrictions have been put in place by 1 February 2022, then a new survey of Members' and Alternates' ability to travel will be undertaken. If this reveals that a quorum may not be attained, then the meeting should be changed to an online format starting on the same date planned for the face-to-face meeting.</p> <p>Between 7 February and 7 March 2022 Should the ability to reach a quorum be brought into doubt due to travel restrictions given events occurring less than one month from the planned start date, then the meeting should be convened online at a later date (but concluding before the deadline for submission of documents for CoP19).</p>
<p>Significant numbers of observers have restricted or no ability to travel to a meeting.</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Whilst the Secretariat has not conducted a survey of the ability of observer Parties and organizations to attend a face-to-face SC74 if sanitary measures remain unchanged, we assume that observer Parties and organizations are in the same situation as the Members and Alternates. This could change if travel due to the pandemic is further restricted before March 2022. Adaptation measures such as online streaming are already in place for those who are unable to attend. Posting of statements and comments by observers could be considered as an adaptation response.</p>
<p>Meeting participants need to present COVID health passes at meeting venue.</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>By 1 February 2022 A review of COVID health pass requirements will be undertaken including any additional requirements of the booster dose. If requirements for a COVID health pass at the meeting venue change sufficiently by 1 February 2022, then a new survey of Members' and Alternates' ability to obtain a COVID health pass will be undertaken. If this reveals that a quorum may not be attained, then the meeting should be changed to an online format starting on the same date.</p> <p>Between 7 February and 7 March 2022 Should the ability to reach a quorum be brought into doubt due to changes to the need for COVID health passes given events occurring less than one month from the planned start date, then the meeting should be convened online at a later date (but concluding before the deadline for submission of documents for CoP19).</p>

Public authorities at the place of the meeting do not permit gatherings of persons such as at meeting venues.	Medium	High	High	<p>France currently permits such gatherings, subject to presentation of a 'sanitary pass' which would be facilitated for Standing Committee participants who fulfilled conditions for entry into French territory.</p> <p>By 1 February 2022 If, on 1 February 2022, French public health measures preclude gatherings of persons such as at a face-to-face meeting of the Standing Committee, then the meeting will need to be changed to an online format starting on the same date.</p> <p>Between 7 February and 7 March 2022 Should such measures be put in place less than one month from the planned start date, then the meeting should be convened online at a later date (but concluding before the deadline for submission of documents for CoP19).</p>
Public authorities at the place of the meeting restrict the number of participants allowed in the meeting venue.	Medium	High	High	<p>There are currently no such capacity restrictions in place in the host country for events such as the Standing Committee meeting, however, this could change before March 2022.</p> <p>By 1 February 2022 If the host government reduces the number of people able to gather, then the size of delegations of observers (and ultimately of representatives and advisors from Members or Acting Members) may need to be limited. If the restrictions on the number of people able to gather is reduced significantly, a meeting only of Members and Alternate Members may need to be convened.</p> <p>If restrictions on the number of participants allowed in the meeting venue may compromise the ability to reach a quorum, then the meeting will need to be changed to an online format starting on the same date.</p> <p>Between 7 February and 7 March 2022 If the host government reduces the number of people able to gather, then the size of delegations of observers (and ultimately of representatives and advisors from Members or Acting Members) may need to be limited. If the restrictions on the number of people able to gather is reduced significantly, a meeting only of Members and Alternate Members may need to be convened.</p> <p>Should the ability to reach a quorum be brought into doubt due to restrictions on capacity given events occurring less than one month from the planned start date, then the meeting should be convened online at a later date (but concluding before the deadline for submission of documents for CoP19).</p>

Table 2. Risk assessment for an online meeting of SC74.

Type of risk	Description	Likelihood in March 2022	Impact	Overall risk rating	Adaptation response
Conservation	Some taxa may be overexploited or illegal trade increases if the Committee does not adopt compliance measures under the Review of Significant Trade.	Low	Low	Low	There may be some reluctance to discuss compliance measures in an online format. This factor therefore remains a risk. If such matters are discussed, mitigation measures could include ensuring that the Party under review was present for the debate and ensuring that the online discussions took place at an appropriate moment in their time zone.
	The SC fails to act timely and authoritatively in response to the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in an inability to adequately support Parties' policy development needs.	Low	Low	Low	SC74 will be held in March 2022, either face-to-face or online. The Committee will therefore be acting with the same degree of timeliness. Whilst the Committee would conduct its business under its existing Rules of Procedure adapted, as they were at SC73 for an online meeting, whether this reduces the authority with which the Committee acts could be a matter for the Members and Alternates to discuss.
Governance	The perceived lack of transparency in decision-making and communications due to the absence of some participants leads to a decrease in trust or commitment and goodwill of Parties and observers.	Low	Medium	Medium	Experience from SC73, AC31 and PC25 shows that with careful planning and preparation, the CITES Committees can act in a transparent way during online meetings. To enhance transparency for the online meetings, the meeting will be live streamed on the CITES YouTube Channel and maintained on the channel as for SC73, AC31 and PC25 to allow participants to follow the meeting. The posting of statements and comments of observers on the CITES webpage could be considered.
	The failure of the SC to meet face-to-face and discharge its responsibilities leads to decrease in trust and support from Parties and observers.	Low	Low	Low	Perception of such a loss of trust and support could be a matter for the Members and Alternates to discuss, but online meetings are increasing in frequency in many intergovernmental fora.
	Some Members and observers would not be able to connect to the meeting resulting in a perceived lack of legitimacy of the decisions taken.	Medium	Low	Low	Past experience at SC73, AC31 and PC25 has shown that technical challenges are quickly being addressed by online platform providers and the Secretariat. Few participants suffer significant challenges in joining online meetings. Some participants will also be absent if discussions are held face-to-face. As shown in document SC73 Doc. 15, between CoP16 and CoP18, 40% of all Parties did not attend any of the regular meetings of SC, AC or PC and a further 27% only attended infrequently (a quarter of all meetings or less) Financial support will be considered to ensure that Members and observers have access to technology to participate in the online meeting. Training sessions and technical support will be available prior and during the online meetings to reduce technical problems.
Logistical	Information in working documents becomes out of date and needs to be revised.	Low	Low	Low	If the meeting start date is postponed to an extent that information in the documents become out of date, addenda to the documents will be published to update the documents.