

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



Sixty-first meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 15-19 August 2011

Administrative matters

Meetings of the Conference of the Parties

STRUCTURE AND LENGTH OF FUTURE MEETINGS

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. The first meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Berne, 1976) was five days long. Subsequent meetings of the Conference of the Parties (CoP) have taken 10 working days, usually with a break of two days in the middle.
3. For many years, the meetings of the CoP have been preceded by a one- or two-day meeting of the Standing Committee.
4. The recent practice is for the opening ceremony of the CoP to take place on the day before the business of the meeting, so as not to take from the time available for the substantive discussion of working documents and proposals.
5. Adding the days for registration, and for any meetings that precede a meeting of the CoP (such as the Standing Committee or any dialogue meeting on the African elephant), it becomes clear that many participants have to be at the meeting venue for two weeks or more. In the case of the Secretariat staff, the period is many days longer because of the preparations required before the meeting.
6. The length of time that participants have to spend at the venue of CITES meetings has significant cost implications for all. It has particular cost implications for the Host Country, which not only covers the costs of the conference centre and all local costs but also, because of the Resolution on financing (currently Conf. 15.1), has to pay the costs of travel and subsistence of the staff of the CITES Secretariat and the conference staff. It also has cost implications for the Trust Fund, from which the external staff (interpreters, translators, rapporteurs and typists) are paid. A less tangible cost is the effect of long meetings on all the participants and their families.
7. The total number of agenda items discussed at CoPs has not varied enormously in the past 10 years. The total number of proposals to amend the Appendices has generally declined over this period (from 75 at CoP10 to 42 at CoP15). This suggests the possibility of reducing the time needed for discussion, although it must be recognized that, the total number of working documents and proposals is not, by itself, a good indicator of the time required for the discussions, because some topics can be complex and require long negotiations.
8. However, the Secretariat's impression is that it may be possible to reduce the overall length of the meetings of the CoP by at least one day. It therefore wishes to explore possible options to achieve this to the extent that this is possible without creating a detrimental effect on the conduct of the meeting.

9. The Secretariat has considered three options:

a) Making the day of the opening ceremony a full working day:

This reflects the usual practice before CoP11, except that there was a one-day break between the meeting of the Standing Committee and the first day of the meeting. This seems to be a good idea but is not being suggested for CoP16, for which plans have been made to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the conclusion of the Convention (on 3 March 2013);

b) Reducing the mid-meeting break to one day rather than two:

Although this would be possible theoretically, experience shows that, without increasing resources, two days are needed to complete processing (preparing, editing, referencing, formatting, translating, printing, distribution, etc.) of documentation in preparation for the second week of the meeting. It should also be taken into consideration that the mid-meeting break is also an opportunity for working groups to make progress, for the Host Country to show the participants its wildlife, its conservation efforts and its culture, and for participants to prepare themselves for the remaining days when all the decisions will be finalized.

c) Reducing the second working week to four days instead of five:

This seems to be the best option. It will require good organization and good chairmanship to achieve it. Moreover, it could require one or more evening sessions, which are a rarity at CITES meetings. They have a financial impact for the Host Country and the Secretariat in requiring additional work for technicians, conference centre staff, interpreters, translators and rapporteurs, who are external staff. Evening sessions are therefore best avoided.

10. In light of the above, the Secretariat believes that the only feasible option to reduce the length of CoP16 without increasing resources is the reduction of the second working week to four days. It would therefore like to discuss the possible implementation of this option for CoP16 and, if successful, future meetings. The Secretariat would appreciate the views of the Standing Committee and observer Parties and would welcome all practical suggestions.