

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



Fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Doha (Qatar), 13-25 March 2010

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

Compliance and enforcement

NATIONAL REPORTS

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat, in consultation with the Standing Committee Working Group on Special Reporting Requirements.
2. At its 14th meeting (CoP14, The Hague, 2007), the Conference of the Parties adopted the following Decisions:

Directed to the Standing Committee

14.37 *The Standing Committee, with the assistance of the Secretariat, the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre and IUCN – The World Conservation Union, shall undertake a review of the recommendations to Parties to provide special reports under the Convention, assess whether they have been or might be effectively incorporated into the annual and biennial reports and consider how the biennial report format might be revised to facilitate such incorporation. It shall report at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties on its conclusions and recommendations.*

Directed to the Secretariat

14.38 *The Secretariat shall:*

- a) *continue to collaborate with the secretariats of other biodiversity-related conventions, UNEP and other bodies in order to facilitate the harmonization of knowledge management and reporting;*
- b) *identify additional ways to reduce the reporting burden on Parties, inter alia, in the context of its ongoing review of the Resolutions and Decisions of the Conference of the Parties, its support to the Standing Committee on electronic permitting and its work with IUCN or other organizations to compile and analyse CITES-related reports; and*
- c) *report at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties on the results of this work.*

The Conference also adopted Decisions 14.39 - 14.41 on *Reporting on trade in artificially propagated plants*, which are covered by document CoP15 Doc. 22 on the same subject.

Working Group on Special Reporting Requirements

3. At its 57th meeting (SC57, Geneva, July 2008), the Standing Committee established a Working Group on Special Reporting Requirements and agreed that its composition would be determined by postal procedure. This led to an unanticipated delay in the formation of the Working Group, and electronic discussions among its members were only launched in June 2009.

4. The Standing Committee took note of the progress made on the issue of special reporting requirements at its 58th meeting (SC58, Geneva, July 2009). It agreed to obtain a nomination from Asia for membership in the Working Group, but this had not yet occurred at the time of writing (October 2009). During its discussion of indicators under the *CITES Strategic Vision: 2008-2013*, the Standing Committee instructed the Working Group to “follow up on how the reporting required in these indicators would be undertaken” (see document CoP15 Doc. xx on *Implementation of the Strategic Vision: 2008-2013*).
5. At the time of writing, the Working Group comprised representatives of Australia, Canada, Costa Rica, Kenya, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) and the Secretariat. Members had accepted the offer of the United Kingdom to serve as chair and begun developing a work plan.
6. To facilitate the Working Group’s discussions, the Secretariat provided members with copies of the results of the European Community’s review of the biennial report format. It also drew members’ attention to paragraph 14 of document SC58 Doc. 20 on *Ranching operations*, which said that the Working Group was expected to consider ranching reports when implementing its terms of reference. UNEP-WCMC has provided the Secretariat with an updated list of special reporting requirements, which will soon be shared with the Working Group and which should assist the Working Group in developing and implementing its work plan.
7. As the Working Group has not yet had an opportunity to address the issues identified in Decision 14.37, or to initiate consideration of its new mandate concerning the indicators under the *CITES Strategic Vision: 2008-2013*, it seems sensible to continue the Working Group until the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (2013).

Submission of national reports

8. Mauritania (since 6 May 2003) and Somalia (since 19 December 2002) unfortunately remain subject to a recommendation to suspend trade for the failure to submit annual reports. The Secretariat has been in contact with representatives of both countries, and there are positive indications that Mauritania will soon submit its missing annual reports. It also seemed that Somalia might be in a position to report, but the current security situation makes a response difficult to predict.
9. Pursuant to Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev. CoP14), the Standing Committee has continued to “determine, on the basis of reports presented by the Secretariat, which Parties have failed, for three consecutive years and without having provided adequate justification, to provide the annual reports required under Article VIII, paragraph 7 (a), of the Convention within the deadline (or any extended deadline)”. To date, those Parties concerned by such a determination have thereafter submitted the missing reports. The submission of annual reports will once again be reviewed by the Standing Committee at its 59th meeting (Doha, 12 March 2010).
10. The Secretariat reported at SC57 that “[s]ubmission levels for national reports, particularly biennial reports could be improved”. It welcomed “any suggestions or assistance that members of the Standing Committee might be able to provide to ensure better awareness of and compliance with CITES reporting obligations” (see document SC57 Doc. 21). At SC58, the Secretariat reported as follows, in document SC58 Doc. 19:

With regard to biennial reports, the number of submission for the period 2005-2006 (68 Parties) is significantly lower than for the period 2003-2004 (91 Parties). As it has done in the past, the Secretariat will send a letter to Parties encouraging them to submit any annual or biennial reports which the Secretariat’s records show are missing. The apparent downward trend in national report submissions is also something which the Working Group on Special Reporting Requirements...should consider and seek to address in the recommendations that will be made under Decision 14.37 of the Conference of the Parties.

11. The online biennial report format developed in consultation with UNEP-WCMC, using funds available under a project on knowledge management, requires additional development and a supportive search engine before it constitutes a practical tool for Parties. It is hoped that external funds will be identified in the near future to enable this work to be done.

Analysis of national reports

12. The Secretariat also reported at SC58 that, “[w]hile conducting its work, particularly in relation to capacity-building and the undertaking of technical studies or reviews, [it] has found that the Parties’ biennial reports are a useful source of implementation information on a range of topics. Nevertheless, there seems to be scope for Parties and the Secretariat to do more to ensure that both biennial and annual reports are fully-utilized resources” (see document SC58 Doc. 19).
13. In connection with the above, external funds recently provided to the Secretariat by the United States of America will be used to contract UNEP-WCMC to prepare: an overview of global wildlife trade; a set of national trade profiles; and an analysis of the 2005-2006 and 2007-2008 biennial reports. The last item will build on the analysis of the 2003-2004 biennial reports prepared for CoP14 by UNEP-WCMC, under contract with the Secretariat (see document CoP14 Inf. 15.). It is expected that the outputs produced under the anticipated contract will be available by the present meeting.

Harmonization of knowledge management and reporting

14. The Secretariat advised the Standing Committee at SC57 that it had participated in a Workshop on Knowledge Management among Biodiversity-related MEAs, which was organized by UNEP-WCMC and UNEP’s Division of Environmental Law and Conventions (Cambridge, March 2008). In September 2009, the Secretariat assisted the organization of and co-chaired with UNEP-DELC a somewhat broader UNEP Workshop on Knowledge Management and MEAs. Participants included representatives from the secretariats of biodiversity-related MEAs, the chemicals and hazardous wastes conventions, UNEP’s Division of Environmental Law and Conventions, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UNEP-WCMC, ECOLEX (a database of environmental law information jointly operated by FAO, UNEP and IUCN) and TEMATEA (a project on issue-based modules for coherent implementation of biodiversity-related conventions). Issues addressed in the workshop included: creation of an enabling environment for capturing, managing and sharing the knowledge assets of MEAs; enhancement of the technical capacity of MEA secretariats to facilitate the development of knowledge bases and tools; review of existing interoperability projects and how they may be harmonized; and the establishment of a ‘proof of concept’ project with assistance from UNEP-DELC. The final workshop report will be made available through the UNEP and CITES websites.
15. During the 2008 knowledge management workshop, participants decided that a new and more realistic concept of harmonized reporting needed to be conveyed to MEA Parties. In this connection, a paper on the *Preconditions for harmonization of reporting to biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements* was prepared by UNEP-WCMC in collaboration with the MEAs and UNEP. A draft version of the paper was reviewed at the seventh meeting of the Liaison Group of the Biodiversity-related Conventions (BLG7, Paris, April 2009). Thereafter, the paper was finalized and the Secretariat circulated it as an information document at SC58 (see document SC58 Inf. 5). Standing Committee members had little time to discuss the paper in any depth, so the Secretariat would encourage Parties to discuss the paper, particularly its conclusions and suggestions for the way forward, at the present meeting. To facilitate such a discussion, the paper is provided in Annexe 2 to this document.
16. As reflected in the report of BLG7, participants agreed to each nominate a focal point for a technical group on national reporting.
17. With regard to initiatives undertaken by Parties in relation to the harmonization of reporting, the Secretariat reported at SC58 as follows:

In March 2009, the Secretariat provided comprehensive written comments on a draft consolidated reporting template that had been developed by countries in the Oceania region with technical and financial support provided by Australia. The draft template has been tested by four Pacific Island countries and there are plans to revise it in the future on the basis of comments received from the secretariats of biodiversity-related conventions and other reviewers.

In its comments, the Secretariat expressed appreciation for the effort made to incorporate a number of questions from the CITES biennial report into the core template as well as supplemental report on CITES implementation. It suggested that there might be scope for including the CITES annual report as well, even though it is quite unique in its objective and format. The Secretariat noted that the template was quite long in comparison with CITES reporting formats and that some of the questions could probably be simplified. In this connection, the Secretariat described its efforts to link reporting

more closely to implementation data that countries regularly maintain and could easily provide. It mentioned that the proposed involvement of other sectors in national reporting was not entirely clear and needed to be carefully considered as reporting is essentially a government obligation and is often required under legislation. The Secretariat pointed out that a proposed three-year reporting cycle would be difficult for CITES Parties to implement because of the annual and biennial reports required under Article VIII of the Convention.

18. On 2 October 2009, Australia informed the Secretariat that it had drafted a progress report for the 20th meeting of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (November 2009) on *Streamlined reporting by Pacific Island countries to biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements*. The Secretariat provided some brief comments on the draft progress report and advised Australia that it would refer to the report in the present document. Australia has also advised the Secretariat of its desire to submit the progress report to the next meeting of the BLG (scheduled to take place during January 2010 in Paris), for consideration and possible action.
19. At SC58, the Secretariat also reported the following:

The Secretariat was invited by the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity to participate in an ASEAN Workshop on Harmonization of Reporting to Biodiversity-Related Conventions (Hanoi, April 2009) but had to decline because of work priorities associated with the 24th meeting of the CITES Animals Committee (Geneva, April 2009). It put workshop organizers in contact with the CITES Management Authority of Viet Nam, which agreed to serve as a CITES resource person. The Secretariat understands that the workshop was quite successful, due in significant part to the participation of the Vietnamese CITES authorities, and would like to thank Viet Nam for helping to strengthen cooperation between ASEAN, CITES, other biodiversity-related conventions and UNEP-WCMC in the area of harmonized reporting.

A summary report of the workshop and a workshop output document are available at www.aseanbiodiversity.org.

Ways to reduce the reporting burden on Parties

20. A number of the efforts underway to reduce the reporting burden on Parties have already been mentioned above. With regard to the identification of other ways to reduce this burden, the Secretariat reported at SC58 as follows:

With the aim of facilitating the preparation and submission of national report data, the Secretariat plans in the near future to seek external funds for a project to explore the feasibility of CITES Parties directly entering their trade data into a version of the CITES trade database placed on a 'development server'. Once verification of the trade data was completed by UNEP-WCMC, the data would be moved to the CITES trade database on the public server.

The Secretariat is interested in doing something similar with biennial report information, so that reporting is linked as closely as possible with implementation data that countries might regularly maintain and could easily provide. Enabling countries to enter their implementation data directly into a database could help to make reporting more timely. Such a practice might also require CITES Parties to consider the way in which they interpret Article VIII of the Convention, as they shift from preparation of a stand-alone report (whether printed or electronic) to entering relevant data into a web-based template.

Ongoing activities of the Working Group on Information Technologies and Electronic Systems, including the development of a CD-ROM and Web-based toolkit on electronic permitting systems, have implications for national reporting and work in both areas should be coherent and mutually supportive.

21. The Working Group on Special Reporting Requirements should play a major role in identifying ways to reduce the reporting burden of Parties. Work done in relation to the reporting of trade in artificially propagated plants will also contribute to this objective.
22. The Secretariat has suggested to the Working Group that it should be aware of the links between reporting and other ongoing national and international initiatives regarding knowledge management, a possible Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, information technologies

and electronic systems, and international environmental governance. It is important to ensure that the Working Group takes these initiatives into account and that its efforts contribute to a coherent approach being taken in all of them.

Recommendations

23. It is recommended that the Conference of the Parties adopt the proposed revisions to Decisions 14.37 and 14.38 that are contained in Annexe 1 to this document.

PROPOSED REVISIONS TO DECISIONS 14.37 AND 14.38

NB: Text to be deleted is ~~crossed out~~. Proposed new text is underlined.

Directed to the Standing Committee

14.37 The Standing Committee, with the assistance of ~~the Secretariat, the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre and IUCN – The World Conservation Union~~ its Working Group on Special Reporting Requirements and the Secretariat, shall:

- a) ~~undertake a~~ continue its review of the recommendations to Parties to provide special reports under the Convention, assess whether they have been or might be effectively incorporated into the annual and biennial reports, and consider how the biennial report format might be revised to facilitate such incorporation;
- b) follow up on how the reporting required in the indicators for the *CITES Strategic Vision: 2008-2013* would be undertaken; and
- c) report at the 156th meeting of the Conference of the Parties on its conclusions and recommendations.

Directed to the Secretariat

14.38 The Secretariat shall:

- a) continue to collaborate with the secretariats of other ~~biodiversity-related~~ conventions, UNEP and other bodies in order to facilitate the harmonization of knowledge management and reporting;
- b) identify additional ways to reduce the reporting burden on Parties, *inter alia*, in the context of Party-led initiatives, its ongoing review of the Resolutions and Decisions of the Conference of the Parties, its support to the Standing Committee on electronic permitting and its work with ~~IUCN or other organizations~~ partners to compile and analyse CITES-related reports; and
- c) report at the 156th meeting of the Conference of the Parties on the results of this work.



PRECONDITIONS FOR HARMONIZATION OF REPORTING TO BIODIVERSITY-RELATED MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS¹

Introduction and purpose of this paper

1. Most of the multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) require Parties to report on national implementation on a regular basis. In recent years there has been a growing recognition that the reporting burden for Parties has continued to increase, despite some efforts having been made to simplify and otherwise facilitate MEA reporting. In considering this, it is important to recognize that reporting processes and the reports themselves should be supporting rather than complicating MEA implementation, particularly at the national level. Following on from these observations, there are clear advantages to be obtained from streamlining and/or harmonizing national reporting to these conventions, as well as the underlying national information management. The practical implications of various harmonization options, however, should be well understood.
2. Spanning more than a decade, a series of papers has been written and a number of workshops conducted exploring options for harmonizing and streamlining approaches to reporting to the biodiversity-related MEAs, trying to identify options to reduce the reporting burden for Parties (see *Annex I* for the history of efforts towards harmonization of reporting). In addition, the governing bodies of a number of biodiversity-related MEAs have adopted decisions or resolutions supporting this work (see *Annex II* for the mandates provided by biodiversity-related MEAs for harmonization of reporting). In particular, a series of national pilot projects coordinated by UNEP with the support of MEA secretariats (see *Annex I* for details) have provided insights into options for and challenges to harmonization of reporting at the national level where harmonization would need to be ultimately implemented.
3. The harmonization of information management and reporting can be defined as those activities that lead to a more integrated process, reduction of duplication and greater sharing of information. This would support the more efficient and coherent implementation of the conventions and agreements involved. A number of options for harmonization of reporting have been discussed over the years and the pilot projects have tested some of them. The options range from one consolidated report for all the MEAs involved to joint thematic reports between a limited number of MEAs, but they also include the identification of MEA information needs and subsequent reorganization and better alignment and coordination of different reporting formats. Importantly, the options for harmonization extend to the national level where information management could become a coordinated and simplified process between those in charge of delivering and/or assembling information for national reports. These aspects are discussed in more detail further below.
4. From 7 to 9 March 2008, UNEP convened a workshop on knowledge management for biodiversity-related conventions and agreements in Cambridge, United Kingdom. The workshop was attended by the secretariats of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the African – Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) and the Indian Ocean South-East Asian Marine Turtle Memorandum of Understanding (IOSEA). Among

In collaboration with:



other issues, the workshop discussed recent developments on harmonization of reporting and concluded the following: *A paper on pre-conditions for harmonization of national reporting can help countries understand the rationale for and challenges to harmonization of national reporting. This will be drafted by UNEP-WCMC for secretariats to distribute.*

5. Participants at the workshop felt that, after many years of discussing harmonization of reporting, it was time to move ahead but that there was a need to summarise the lessons from those discussions. This should help to correct possible misperceptions and to explain what is actually feasible or achievable regarding harmonization of reporting and its expected impact in terms of reducing the reporting burden. The purpose of this paper is therefore to inform discussions on harmonization at the meetings of governing bodies to biodiversity-related MEAs as well as at the national level.

Entry points for harmonization of reporting: the global and the national level

6. Harmonization of reporting is a process that needs to be addressed at both global and national levels.
 - a) Globally, it affects the reporting formats used by individual conventions, although there remain major questions on the extent to which these can be harmonized. The decision about harmonization at the global level rests with the governing bodies of the MEAs, several of which have provided mandates for continuing work on harmonization (see Annex II).
 - b) Importantly, harmonization also needs to be addressed at the national level to be fully effective. Harmonization of reporting has implications for the way biodiversity data and information are generated and managed nationally. It also affects the cooperative arrangements between the MEAs and their focal points within each country.

Obstacles to harmonization of reporting

7. A number of obstacles to harmonization of reporting have been identified. These include at the *global level* the following:
 - The reporting processes for most MEAs, although evolving constantly, are well established and have been in place for many years – this might make major moves towards cooperation with other conventions more difficult.
 - There is a concern that some States that are not Party to all MEAs involved might have little reason to agree to changes in the reporting process.
 - The reporting cycles of MEAs differ considerably, varying between annual reporting and reporting on a six-year cycle.
 - MEAs have not always identified what information they require. A thorough consideration of the information needs for the various bodies of MEAs and, not least, for Parties, has in some cases proven helpful for better focusing the requests for information that Parties might agree to provide or governing bodies to agreements might agree to request. This challenge has implications for the reporting process, through which a substantial part of the information needs of MEAs would be materialized.
 - Different MEAs might use different terminologies or follow different nomenclatures for species or habitat types/ biomes, which might hamper harmonization efforts.
8. At the *national level*, major obstacles to harmonization of reporting may include the following:
 - The information needed for reporting to an MEA might be widely scattered throughout different institutions and organizations, without a central mechanism (such as a national biodiversity database) that brings relevant data and information together.
 - There is often a lack of coordination among national focal points or the institutions in charge of national reporting. This leads to repeated calls for the same data and information for national reports to different MEAs reaching the holders of information (e.g. in one year the national focal point to one MEA requests information on forest biodiversity from the national forestry agency while in the following

year this agency is asked by the national focal point to another MEA for the same or very similar information).

- In some cases, there may be a lack of clarity or an overlap in the responsibilities of government departments or agencies in charge of different conventions, thus preventing coordination mechanisms from being agreed upon and accepted.
- In many developing countries, there is a lack of human, financial and/or technical capacity to address issues of data and information management as well as coordination between various ministries, agencies and/or stakeholders.

Preconditions for harmonization of reporting – general aspects of national reporting

9. **Purpose of national reporting:** It is crucial that national reporting is not just seen as a cumbersome obligation arising from an international treaty, but as a tool to support implementation. Reporting serves a variety of purposes, among them:

- demonstrating compliance, including the enactment of appropriate legislation;
- developing an overview of implementation, projects and financial matters;
- identifying relationships to, and interactions with, other MEA processes, including amongst the subject areas covered by the MEAs;
- reflecting on work done and identifying future/further work;
- sharing experience; and
- providing information on the status of biodiversity, for example in the framework of the 2010 biodiversity target.

Most of these aspects, in principle, should involve summarising information that already exists at national level and packaging it for transmittal to the MEAs. Ideally, there should be limited extra burden on national authorities because they would already be compiling much of the information needed for their own domestic purposes. In this respect, difficulties in reporting to the MEAs may reflect either a mismatch between information required for the MEAs and at national level, and/or inadequate national information management.

10. **The use of reported information:** While the articles of many MEAs define in general terms the contents of national reports, it is essential that governing bodies agree about the way the reported information will be used, e.g. for overviews of the status of implementation of treaties, for guiding decisions or resolutions of governing bodies, and for the preparation of publications. It is also essential that the reported information is actually used, and that Parties can clearly see and understand the use that has been made of the reports that they have submitted.

Preconditions for harmonization of reporting at the national level

11. **Arrangements between MEA focal points:** At the national level, harmonization of reporting requires cooperative arrangements between national focal points and/or the institutions in charge of different MEAs. In some countries, there is a national committee which coordinates the implementation of a single biodiversity-related MEA (e.g. CITES or Ramsar). There are also a few national coordination bodies comprising the focal points of the biodiversity-related MEAs, and a number of developing countries, particularly in Africa, have established national coordination committees for the Rio Conventions (CBD, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification).

12. **Arrangements between data-collecting institutions:** Any harmonization efforts at the national level would benefit from cooperative arrangements between the national institutions that collect and manage biodiversity data and information. This could result in an information strategy, a more coordinated approach to information networking, and/or a more integrated and coordinated biodiversity information system. Whatever the cooperative arrangement, it is essential that information relevant for national reporting to MEAs is available and easily accessible for the focal points or agencies that assemble the national reports. For this to happen, some of the following issues would normally need to be addressed:

- Is the information needed for national purposes and for MEA reporting collected from all relevant data holders, including private and non-governmental organizations?
- Can data standards be harmonized?

- How is the information stored, retrieved, analysed and made available?
- Are there clear roles and responsibilities for collecting data and preparing national information and MEA reports based upon it?
- Is there duplication in information collection and storage?
- How often is the information updated?
- How easily can MEA focal points - and other stakeholders - access the information?
- Do MEA focal points have the authority and means to coordinate all aspects of the obligations for national implementation and to access the information available to support national implementation?

13. **Links between supporting reporting and supporting implementation:** Any improvement in data and information management and reporting at the national level will also support, and further encourage, harmonized national implementation. Indeed any support for national reporting should be considered in terms of support for national implementation and the work of national focal points in overseeing that implementation. Such support would also extend to the involvement in national implementation of indigenous and local communities, the private sector and non-governmental organizations.

Preconditions for harmonization of reporting at the global (MEA) level

14. **Clarity about information needs:** The governing bodies of MEAs often decide to request a large amount of information from Parties and sometimes other stakeholders. In some cases, two or more MEAs require the same or overlapping information. This fact raises the following questions:
- Is there scope for reducing the requests to Parties by one MEA because the information is collected already by another MEA?
 - What is the balance between the need for information on the activities undertaken by Parties for implementation of the convention (processes) and the results of these activities (outcomes)?
 - Similarly, what is the balance between qualitative and quantitative information?

These questions may need to be put into a wider context:

- What are the relations between MEAs in terms of decisions and actions taken to ensure their coherent implementation and arrangements for accessing the information required for that purpose?
- What information is available from sources outside a particular MEA and therefore, what information would need to be requested through the national reports of related MEAs? The options that information technology offers in making available information from other MEAs or additional sources outside a particular MEA could play an important role in this regard. Online reporting, for example, makes it easier to provide information, which has been reported to one MEA, to the bodies and Parties of the other MEAs.

15. **Inter-MEA agreements on information needs and management:** The governing bodies of MEAs might not only wish to identify their own information needs but also where these requirements overlap with those of other MEAs. This could lead to agreements among MEAs on who is collecting what information, avoiding overlaps and duplication. It could also result in MEAs agreeing on which MEA will request which information from Parties, and subsequently how the information acquired will be shared among the MEAs.

16. **Joint systems of information management:** MEAs are increasingly considering joint systems of information management. This approach not only allows for a more efficient use of MEA resources, but also for easier access to information by Parties and other stakeholders. The Task Force on Streamlining Forest-related Reporting of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) has established a CPF Portal on Forest Reporting (<http://www.fao.org/forestry/cpf-mar/en/>), a good example for such joint information management systems. In addition, the concept of a core report to all biodiversity-related conventions with smaller treaty-specific add-on-reports (as used by the Human Rights Treaty System) warrants further exploration (see <http://www.unepwcmc.org/conventions/harmonization/projects.htm> for more information). Some MEAs are also examining ways to harmonize information formats, protocols and standards with a view to facilitating information exchange, development of new information products, and support for knowledge management initiatives. Online reporting could play a particularly important role here, as it makes the delivery of national reports by Parties and the analysis of reported information easier, with a view of improved access to such information across related MEAs.

17. **Addressing the different reporting cycles:** The widely differing reporting cycles of the biodiversity-related MEAs have consistently been identified as a major obstacle for harmonization. Harmonizing these cycles might be difficult and would involve mandates from the governing bodies of the MEAs involved and

in some cases provisions within the MEAs themselves. Those differing cycles might, however, not be a real problem if the systems of information collection are better streamlined at the national level. If, for example, information at the national level, which is relevant to MEA reports, is made available on a regular basis (e.g. annually), focal points could use such information to fulfil their reporting obligations whatever the reporting cycles. The concept of a core report with treaty-specific add-on reports referred to in the previous paragraph would allow for the treaty-specific reports to be submitted by the different deadlines for the MEAs involved. If agreed, the core report could be up-dated on a regular basis independent of the reporting cycles. In this context, the MEAs could also consider agreeing on the simultaneous and coordinated production of summary reports, compiled from information from national reports and other reports. Each agreement could produce a summary of the status of, e.g. wetlands, migratory species, species in trade, the natural world heritage, or biodiversity in general. Such reports do exist but they have not been produced by the various MEAs in a coordinated manner. Preparation of these reports may require technical and/or financial support of some kind.

18. **Mandates from governing bodies:** Efforts to harmonize national reporting between MEAs need the mandate from the governing bodies of the agreements concerned. A number of biodiversity-related agreements have provided such mandates in recent years (see Annex II). Future major steps in harmonization would require renewed mandates – which themselves would need to be harmonized between the MEAs involved, with an expectation that the governing bodies would then take full account of the outcomes of the mandated work.
19. **Role of key stakeholders:** Moving the harmonization agenda forward at the MEA level requires commitment from key stakeholders, including Parties and secretariats. The CPF Task Force on Streamlining Forest-related Reporting referred to above provides a good example: it was established through the initiative of committed staff members of the MEAs and agencies involved. Committed stakeholders would need to take, or suggest, leadership in driving the harmonization agenda forward.

Conclusions and suggestions for the way forward

20. Many years of discussing and testing potential approaches to harmonization of national reporting to the biodiversity-related MEAs and beyond have produced a wealth of insight into the challenges and options. This paper highlights the most relevant of these. It is obvious that a more practical approach is now needed, addressing the preconditions identified above and moving towards harmonization.
21. The 2006-2008 UNEP Knowledge Management project (see <http://www.unepwcmc.org/conventions/harmonization/projects.htm>) explored two possible ways forward:
 - a) Firstly, the approach to harmonization that the Human Rights Treaty System has taken, where Parties are requested to provide a core report relevant for all treaties involved, supplemented by smaller treaty-specific reports that address the specific information needs of the MEAs involved. The work on harmonization of reporting under the Knowledge Management project suggested a framework for such a core report for CBD, CITES, CMS, Ramsar Convention, AWEA and IOSEA.
 - b) Secondly, the project suggested joint thematic reporting as a way to implement harmonization of reporting. Following on from a mandate from the CBD Conference of the Parties on joint thematic reporting with the Ramsar Convention on inland waters (see Annex II), a first step towards a comprehensive framework for joint inland water reporting was developed, as was a similar framework for reporting on drylands for the CBD and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. In addition, a framework for joint reporting for CMS, AWEA and IOSEA was developed.
22. Testing harmonization for specific themes of relevance to a limited number of MEAs, such as inland waters (see the previous paragraph), might result in important lessons about the feasibility of harmonization of national reporting. Such themes could be easily identified, and the lessons from the discussions between CBD and Ramsar on potential joint reporting on inland waters be analysed in order to inform similar approaches to harmonization for joint themes between MEAs.
23. An approach not dissimilar to the one of the Human Rights Treaty System is currently (as of February 2009) being explored through a project of the Australian Government Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, in collaboration with the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), in Pacific Island Countries. This project is testing a consolidated template for reporting to the biodiversity-related conventions (CBD, CITES, CMS, Ramsar, World Heritage Convention). The draft template consists of a 'core report' for all the five conventions, with annexes providing

supplementary information specific to the individual conventions. It is hoped that the project provides a regional perspective of harmonization as well as further insights into the feasibility of harmonizing reporting formats across the range of biodiversity-related MEAs.

24. In addition consideration should be given to the potential value of additional guidance for Parties on how to manage data and information in a harmonized manner for their own domestic purposes so that it is available for input to national reports for MEAs at the same time as supporting national focal points in tracking implementation and achievement of objectives.

A SHORT HISTORY OF EFFORTS TOWARDS HARMONIZATION OF
REPORTING TO THE BIODIVERSITY-RELATED AGREEMENTS

This annex is an attempt to provide an overview of the history of key events addressing harmonization of reporting. It is restricted to the biodiversity-related conventions and agreements and closely-related activities. It does not include the meetings of governing bodies of the conventions where harmonization was discussed (see Annex II for the mandates provided by the conventions) nor does it contain the guidance that bodies of the individual MEAs have provided on national reporting, such as guidelines and report formats.

- 1997** *Guiding Principles for National Reporting* (prepared for CBD SBSTTA 3, see <http://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/sbstta/sbstta-03/information/sbstta-03-inf-16-en.pdf>; redrafted for the 2000 workshop; see below and <http://www.unepwcmc.org/conventions/harmonization/workshop/BP1.pdf>)
- 1998** *Feasibility Study for a Harmonised Information Management Infrastructure for Biodiversity-related Treaties*, by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, commissioned by CBD, CITES, CMS, Ramsar Convention, World Heritage Convention and UNEP (<http://www.unepwcmc.org/conventions/harmonization/Feasibility%20Study%201998.pdf>)
- 1999** United Nations University International Conference on Inter-linkages: Synergies and Coordination between Multilateral Environmental Agreements, 14-16 July, Tokyo, Japan (see conference report at <http://www.ias.unu.edu/binaries/Interlinkages.PDF>). A paper on *Harmonizing the information management infrastructure for biodiversity-related treaties* was presented to the conference (http://www.unepwcmc.org/conventions/harmonization/Harmonizing%20info%20management_JH%20&%20MC_1999.pdf)
- 2000** *Towards the harmonization of National Reporting to Biodiversity-related Treaties* – UNEP/MEA secretariats workshop, 30-31 October, Cambridge, UK (http://www.unepwcmc.org/conventions/harmonization/workshop_00.cfm)
- 2001-2003** UNEP pilot projects on harmonization of national reporting in Ghana, Indonesia, Panama and the Seychelles (<http://www.unep-wcmc.org/conventions/harmonization/projects.htm>)
- 2001-2004** Issue Management Group *Harmonization of Information Management and Reporting for Biodiversity-related Treaties* of the Environment Management Group. The activities included drafting a Harmonization Action Plan (<http://www.unemg.org/document/harmonization.php>)
- 2002** Establishment of the Task Force on Streamlining Forest-related Reporting of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (<http://www.fao.org/forestry/7692/en/>); the Task Force set up the CPF Portal on Forest Reporting (<http://www.fao.org/forestry/cpf-mar/en/>)
- 2004** *Towards the harmonization of national reporting to biodiversity-related treaties* – UNEP/UNEP-WCMC/MEA secretariats workshop, 22-23 September, Haasrode, Belgium (<http://www.unep-wcmc.org/conventions/harmonization/workshop.htm>)
- 2006** UNEP Knowledge Management meeting - Workshop on harmonization of reporting, 16 June, Cambridge, UK (<http://www.unep-wcmc.org/conventions/harmonization/SUMMAR.pdf>)
- From 2007** Project of the Australian Government Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, in collaboration with the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), on harmonization of national reporting in Pacific Island Countries. This project is testing a consolidated template for reporting to the biodiversity-related conventions (CBD, CITES, CMS, Ramsar, World Heritage Convention).
- 2008** UNEP/MEA secretariats workshop on Knowledge Management among Biodiversity-related MEAs, 7-9 March, Cambridge, UK (http://www.unepwcmc.org/conventions/docs/KM%20workshop%20March2008%20report_final_18_Apr.pdf)
- 2009** ASEAN Workshop on Harmonization of Reporting to Biodiversity-Related Conventions, 15- 17 April, Hanoi, Vietnam (http://www.aseanbiodiversity.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=58&Itemid=127 and <http://www.unep-wcmc.org/conventions/harmonization/papers.htm>)

**MANDATES FOR HARMONIZATION OF REPORTING BY
GOVERNING BODIES OF THE BIODIVERSITY-RELATED AGREEMENTS
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (CBD)**

COP Decision IX/19 (2008) (Biological diversity of inland water ecosystems): The COP invites the Ramsar Convention, the United Nations Environment Programme and its World Conservation Monitoring Centre to continue their joint work on harmonized reporting between the Ramsar Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

COP decision VIII/14 (2006): The COP takes note of the recommendations from the Workshop Towards the Harmonization of National Reporting to Biodiversity-related Treaties, organized by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEPWCMC) and held in September 2004 (UNEP/CBD/WG-RI/1/INF/6), and encourages the Liaison Group of the Biodiversity-related Conventions, in liaison with UNEP-WCMC and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, to give further consideration to issues of harmonization of reporting among the biodiversity-related conventions, and to develop proposals thereon.

COP decision VII/25 (2004): The COP encourages the Executive Secretary to continue to participate in the ongoing efforts to harmonize and streamline the national reporting processes of the Convention with those of other biodiversity related conventions and processes with a view to reduce reporting burdens on Parties and increase synergies among biodiversity related conventions, without impeding progress on improvements to the national reporting process to meet the needs of Parties to the Convention.

COP decision VI/20 and decision VI/25 (2002): The COP welcomes the work of the United Nations Environment Programme on the harmonization of environmental reporting and encourages its continuation, whilst recognizing the need to ensure that this does not affect the ability of the Conference of the Parties to adjust national reporting procedures under the Convention in order to better meet the needs of Parties.

CITES

COP decision 14.38 (2007): The Secretariat shall a) continue to collaborate with the secretariats of other biodiversity-related conventions, UNEP and other bodies in order to facilitate the harmonization of knowledge management and reporting; b) identify additional ways to reduce the reporting burden on Parties, *inter alia*, in the context of its ongoing review of the Resolutions and Decisions of the Conference of the Parties, its support to the Standing Committee on electronic permitting and its work with IUCN or other organizations to compile and analyse CITES-related reports; and c) report at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties on the results of this work.

Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)

COP resolution 9.4 (2008): The COP requests the Secretariat to advance harmonization of reporting with other international biodiversity agreements through the development of common reporting modules, via the framework of the Biodiversity Liaison Group and in consultation with UNEPWCMC.

COP resolution 8.11 (2005): The COP invites the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the Biodiversity Liaison Group and UNEP, to advance the harmonization of reporting both within the UNEP-CMS 'family' of Agreements and between relevant conventions.

COP resolution 7.9 (2002): The COP invites the CMS Secretariat and UNEP-WCMC to work closely with the CBD Secretariat in developing a format for CBD Parties to report, through their national reports, on the extent to which they address migratory species at the national level, and on cooperation with other Range States as part of on-going efforts to harmonise national reporting requirements of the biodiversity-related conventions.

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

COP resolution X.11 (2008): Noting that the 8th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in its decision VIII/20 invited the Ramsar Convention to take the lead in developing a framework for harmonized reporting on inland waters, and that UNEP and UNEP-WCMC have commenced this work, as acknowledged by decision IX/19 of the 9th meeting of the CBD COP ... the Conference of the Contracting Parties ... requests the Secretariat to continue its participation in the UNEP-WCMC project for

developing tools for the on-line use of the biodiversity-related conventions, including those for possible on-line harmonized reporting by the respective parties; ... also requests the Secretariat and the STRP to continue to cooperate with the CBD Secretariat, UNEP, and UNEP-WCMC in the development of a framework for harmonized reporting on implementation on inland waters for the CBD and the Ramsar Convention.

COP resolution IX.5 (2005): The Conference of the Contracting Parties, ... aware that UNEP-WCMC held a consultative workshop on the issue of Harmonized National Reporting (Haasrode, Belgium, September 2004), that this issue has also been discussed by the Biodiversity Liaison Group established under CBD Decision VII/26, and that this workshop specifically noted seven key issues concerned with the harmonization of national reporting (CoP Doc. 32) ... requests the Secretary General to continue working with UNEP's Division of Environmental Conventions and the secretariats of other biodiversity-related conventions and agreements concerning more effective convention implementation. Topics could include, inter alia, ... harmonization of national reporting requirements subject to the mandate of each individual convention bearing in mind their Contracting Parties.

COP resolution VIII.26 (2002): The Conference of the Contracting Parties ... urges parties to consider initiating trials of joint reporting involving Ramsar and other multilateral environmental agreements, seeking the advice, as appropriate, of the United Nations Environment Programme.

African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA)

Resolution 4.7 (2008): The Meeting of the Parties... requests the Secretariat, working closely with the Secretariat of the CMS, and with the assistance of UNEP, as necessary, to further advance harmonization of the national report formats of AEWA and CMS, where possible.

Resolution 3.5 (2005): The Meeting of the Parties... instructs the Agreement Secretariat, in close cooperation with the Technical Committee and the CMS Secretariat, to develop an online national report format to be submitted for approval to MOP4. The format should seek to advance harmonization of reporting with other international biodiversity agreements through the development of common reporting modules.