



Towards the harmonization of national reporting to biodiversity-related treaties

*A workshop convened by UNEP-WCMC
in cooperation with the governments of Belgium and the UK
Haasrode, Belgium, 22-23 September, 2004*

Workshop Report

1. Introduction

In October 2000, UNEP convened a workshop ‘Towards the harmonization of national reporting’ where representatives of eight convention and agreement secretariats, eight countries and several international organizations met in Cambridge, UK to discuss options for harmonization of reporting. The needs which the workshop was seeking to address at national and international levels were:

- avoiding duplication of effort in reporting processes;
- increasing efficiency and reducing the burden of reporting; and
- improving access to reported information.

The Cambridge workshop resulted in the establishment of UNEP-sponsored pilot projects in four countries to explore different approaches to harmonization of national reporting to biodiversity-related conventions.

- Assessing the opportunities for linking national reporting to the State of the Environment reporting process (*Ghana*).
- Identifying common information modules, and using this as a basis for developing a coordinated modular approach to reporting (*Indonesia*).
- Exploring potential regional support mechanisms for national information management and associated reporting (*Panama*).
- Assessing the potential for producing a consolidated national report responding to the needs of several conventions (*Seychelles*).

Since October 2000, the importance of working on harmonization and synergies between the different Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) has been repeatedly recognized by the various governing bodies (including specific reference to these national pilot projects in some cases), and many other steps have been taken to address the issue. Harmonization of reporting as an issue has also been reviewed by the UN Environmental Management Group. For four of the five global biodiversity-related treaties, mandates for this work come from:

- Resolutions VII/4 and VIII/26 of the Conference of Parties for the Convention on Wetlands, and the Strategic Plan 2003-2008;
- Decision 12.87 of the CITES Conference of Parties, and the Strategic Vision Through 2005 adopted by Decision 11.1;
- Resolution 7.9 of the Conference of Parties for the Convention on Migratory Species, and the Information Management Plan adopted by Resolution 6.5; and

Funding for the workshop was provided by the following institutions:



- Decisions V/19, VI/25 and VII/25 of the Conference of Parties for the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Following completion of the pilot projects, a workshop was convened by UNEP-WCMC in cooperation with the governments of Belgium and the United Kingdom, at Haasrode, Belgium, 22-23 September 2004. The workshop was attended by representatives of the five global biodiversity-related conventions, two agreement secretariats, eight countries, the European Commission, and a number of international organizations with experience in this area. The objectives of the workshop were to:

- review conclusions and recommendations from the four pilot projects;
- review the conclusions and recommendations of other recent harmonization and streamlining initiatives and the implications of other recent developments in reporting processes;
- use these inputs as a means for further identifying and clarifying mechanisms to support harmonization at the national level; and
- develop plans and set priorities for future work in this area.

2. The purpose of reporting

The reasons for periodically reporting to international conventions and agreements encompass a range of issues, including:

- demonstrating compliance and the enactment of appropriate legislation;
- developing an overview of implementation, projects and financial matters;
- identifying relationships to, and interactions with, other processes;
- reflection on work done and identification of future/further work; and
- status of biodiversity.

However, reports do not capture all of this at present, and perhaps also not in the right balance. Reporting processes for the biodiversity-related conventions and agreements rarely provide a complete overview of implementation, and there has been a focus on reporting on process rather than on outcomes - on what has been done rather than on achievement and future prognosis.

Meanwhile, there is a growing recognition by countries, convention and agreement secretariats, and other bodies that the reporting burden has been growing and doing so in an uncoordinated and uncontrolled manner. This conflicts with the view that reporting processes and the reports themselves should support implementation, particularly at the national level, rather than being seen as a burden. Improved coordination is needed at national, regional and international levels.

The workshop considered that there was a need for reporting processes at national and international levels to move to increasingly cover outcomes from action, while recognising that information on the processes and actions themselves was still necessary to underpin this. The 2010 target on reducing the current rate of biodiversity loss provides substantial impetus and a focus for beginning to effect such a change.

3. Practical lessons learnt on reporting requirements

Achieving improvements in reporting and associated information management requires attention to many aspects of the work of countries, conventions and agreements. Some of the points that relate specifically to requests for reports include the following.

- i. **Purpose:** Convention governing bodies, advisory bodies and secretariats should carefully consider what they need to know from reporting, what information is required to address this and whether the information is already available. They should also make clear to parties what will be done with the reports, and how the information will be used. Wherever possible, parties should not be expected to provide information that they themselves do not require for implementation.

- ii. **Coverage:** Linked to this, consideration should be given as to whether there is a need to report on all aspects of biodiversity and on all articles of a convention, or whether to be more focused. For example, the burden of reporting can be decreased by concentrating on what will be needed to support discussion at the next meeting of the governing body, rather than by requiring reporting across the whole breadth of a convention or agreement.
- iii. **Inter-linkages:** Consideration should also be given to the fact that information requested for one convention might address an information requirement in another convention, and appropriate steps taken to share information and approaches.
- iv. **Timing:** Consideration should be given to reporting cycles and how they relate to the reporting cycles of other conventions and agreements. Lack of coordination of reporting timetables leads to uneven workloads being placed on countries, with a heavy reporting burden in some years, and a lighter burden in others.
- v. **Convergence:** There are already examples in the forest sector through the work of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), where convention secretariats and other international organizations are working together to define practical steps that can be taken to both reduce reporting burden and increase access to the information compiled through reporting processes. This includes consideration of joint questionnaires, harmonization of terminologies, a web-based forest reporting portal (with easy access to reports and reporting formats), and a joint information framework.
- vi. **On-line reporting:** Some conventions and agreements are already experimenting with on-line reporting, and this could be explored further in the context of others. For example, the Indian Ocean - South-East Asian Marine Turtle Memorandum of Understanding has an on-line reporting form that is already being completed by countries. It is noted that this sort of approach would need to accommodate countries with less electronic and communications capacity.

The pilot projects have been very helpful in showing what can be done and in providing experience for others to learn from. Initiatives under other conventions and bodies have also been particularly helpful demonstrations of what can be done, such as the above-mentioned on-line reporting system of one of the CMS agreements, and the experiences of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) on harmonizing approaches to reporting in the forest sector.

4. Lessons learnt on shifting the focus of reporting

The desire for changes in the reporting regime has come both from top down and bottom up, from work between and within conventions and agreements, and from work within and between countries. The pilot projects have provided good examples of testing approaches for improving the harmonization of reporting, and a number of examples are given in this report. Changes that affect governing bodies, advisory bodies and secretariats in the way in which they approach reporting are particularly identified in the previous section.

The workshop also addressed two other related opportunities to move towards increased harmonization.

- i. **Links to State of the Environment reporting:** SoE reporting was seen as an opportunity to enhance communication and collaboration between sectors. Integration of biodiversity issues into other sectors and into the sustainable development and sustainable use agendas requires a drive from the top of government.
- ii. **Outcome-oriented targets and related reporting:** Establishing targets and then reporting on achievements against them offers a chance for real assessment of implementation. Adoption of the 2010 target, and recognition that it applies to a wide range of conventions, agreements and programmes provides a valuable impetus.

While some changes can be made unilaterally by conventions and agreements, some (such as a more coordinated focus on outcome-oriented reporting) will require rather more collaboration. However, all

such changes will take time and commitment to achieve, and all have resource implications. In addition, introducing changes to all of the conventions and agreements in parallel is a real challenge in resource and capacity terms.

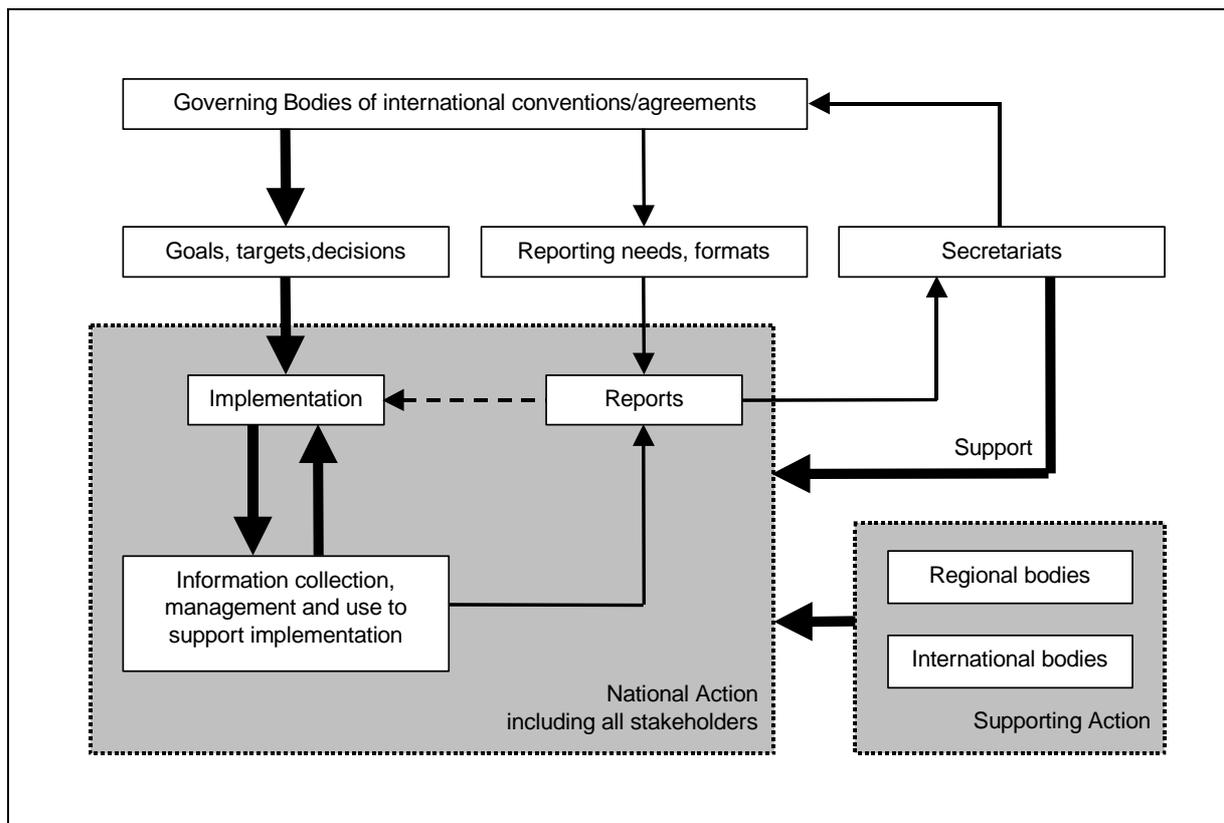
5. Information management and reporting

Improvements in information management at the national and regional level, coupled with a more coordinated approach to implementation of related conventions and agreements, were considered by the workshop to be key mechanisms for increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation of the commitments and/or legal obligations under conventions and agreements to which a country is party. Reporting was necessarily a subsequent goal which should emerge from implementation and more effective information management.

There are three aspects which need to be addressed:

- what information is needed by countries to manage their biodiversity resources and to respond to the international obligations and expectations they have adopted;
- how that information should be managed on a day to day basis in a manner that ensures that the information is available and fit for purpose; and
- how information management is linked to reporting.

A flow diagram was formulated to try to demonstrate the relationships between implementation and reporting, the information management and use required to achieve it, and the role of other organizations in this process.



5.1 Identifying what information is needed

The pilot projects have clearly demonstrated that when the interests and requirements of the various biodiversity-related conventions and agreements are analysed, the activities and information

requirements can be organized into a series of clusters or modules. A corollary of this is that organization of information management in a modular manner leads to more efficient information management and use to support both implementation and reporting. Further advice is needed for countries on how to do this, based on the experience of the pilot projects.

The suggestion was also made that a State of Environment report with relevant chapters, standard modules or themes on biodiversity, might help with the process of compiling and delivering an assessment of the outcomes of implementation of internationally agreed action at the national level. Within these biodiversity modules there could be information on both status and implementation, information on all three levels of biodiversity, and natural resource information (e.g. forests, fisheries, agriculture). Such material would be focused on identified needs and priorities. These issues might be considered when existing guidelines on developing State of Environment reports are reviewed.

There are clearly close parallels between the modular approach to information management and reporting, and the incorporation of biodiversity modules into the State of Environment reporting process.

5.2 Locating and managing the information

Following assessment of information needs, a process of information and institutional mapping should enable a country to identify where information resides, who has it, what format it is in, access conditions and procedures (such as on-line searchability), and so on. In order to effectively respond to information needs for implementation of international agreements it will be necessary to ensure effective coordination of information management and use, and to ensure responsibilities are clear. For many countries this may be a significant challenge, but it is a logical and necessary process.

A centralised database is one approach often considered, but an information network is probably more effective, with a distributed approach to information management and responsibilities for data management residing with those with appropriate mandates, interests and experience. One of the goals of such an information network should clearly be to support implementation of conventions and agreements at the national level. With this in mind, it is important to ensure that the information network addresses information needs and not just information that exists, and is based on an identification of information priorities and an understanding of how information will be used.

Within the network there should be an identification of key responsibilities and a means to ensure integration/coordination perhaps by a central agency, a biodiversity committee or some other coordinating mechanism. The focal points of different MEAs should meet regularly to ensure that the information network is responding to their combined needs. With this in mind, consideration might be given to establishing an integrated clearing-house (including a metadatabase) that could provide information across the various MEAs.

Challenges to development of an effective information management process include data issues such as coverage, validation, compatibility, and so on, but far more important are the “relationship” issues between data providers, including agreements (MoUs, letters of intent, etc), ownership, conditions for access, recognition, incentives, confidence-building, and so on. An information network needs to take into account the requirements of all stakeholders, and to ensure their effective involvement.

It is recognised that regional approaches and collaboration on information networking may assist countries as they develop and implement improvements in their own information management.

5.3 Gaps/problems

Many issues were identified by the workshop as requiring attention, including terminology, data quality and validation. There may also be a need to generate new data, however potential data gaps should be verified (not just perceived), prioritized and a coordinated approach taken to fill them. This could include targeting research and monitoring efforts within a country and/or encouraging visiting foreign scientists to address the identified priorities of the country they are visiting.

Effective reporting in an information network requires sharing of information, but obstacles are often encountered, including: information being viewed as money and power; academic precedence;

information guarding; concerns that sharing information may lead to loss of control; confidentiality concerns; and lack of trust. These all impact on the functioning of the information network.

A well managed national information system, facilitating reporting to conventions and agreements (or possibly even enabling convention secretariats to collect the information from a national web portal), is expected to be beneficial to countries. However, it was also recognised that when establishing systems of information, provisions must be made for potential liability of countries under compliance regimes, which might hamper the delivery of quality information.

In all cases, confidence can be built through demonstrating good practice in the use of information, and sharing experience.

5.4 Capacity development

Improved integration at the national level, and improved management of information for both implementation and reporting, will in many cases require additional guidance, the provision of tools and other support, exchange of experience, and training. This will require the identification of both financial and technical resources, although wherever possible this will build on existing advice, guidelines and mechanisms.

Opportunities also need to be explored for regional coordination of effort in this regard. One of the pilot projects identified opportunities for countries within a region to work closely together to share experience and to work together in developing the tools and approaches for improving information management and use at the national level. This has the potential to work particularly well in regions where there is already a regional mandate for action.

Capacity development may also be required in ensuring involvement of the full range of stakeholders in information collection, management and use, including indigenous peoples and local communities.

6. Improving access to information on reporting

The workshop recognised that one of the steps which might encourage countries to submit reports to the conventions and agreements would be to make access to reporting formats and guidelines even easier.

The current situation could be improved if each convention website made information relevant to its national reports available from one point on its website (some already do so), and then if a combined biodiversity reporting portal was developed along the lines of the CPF forest reporting portal mentioned earlier, perhaps based on the existing Joint Web Site of the Biodiversity Related Conventions or on the UNEP-WCMC webpages on harmonization, to provide access from one point to all of the different reporting formats and guidelines. This would also be a practical demonstration of harmonization in action.

The website could be developed over time, as harmonization and streamlining advance and changes in reporting processes occur, to:

- show the linkages between different reporting requirements;
- identify common questions and themes and reporting responsibilities;
- include search tools to access information; and
- include best practices on information management and reporting by countries.

At the national level, countries could improve the dissemination of the reports that are written about their biodiversity by, for example, making them all available from a single website. This relates to other ideas expressed during the workshop for developing a national clearing-house for information management and dissemination, and to more general information management issues.

7. Thematic approaches to harmonized reporting

Developing one single report that serves the needs of all conventions and agreements was considered to be very difficult to achieve, but joint thematic reports that addressed the needs of several

conventions and agreements were seen by the workshop as an interesting opportunity. Ideally, a national information network or clearing-house could facilitate better compilation of information on a thematic basis and prepare it in a way that allowed for easy access by national focal points, convention secretariats and others, whenever they require it.

Internationally, the approach of the CPF Task Force on Forest-related Reporting provides useful lessons. Specifically, the task force:

- brings together experts on a specific theme from the different conventions and agencies, and promotes joint information requests, common terminologies and sharing of information;
- has established a CPF Portal on Reporting facilitating access to forest-related national reports and questionnaires; and
- enhances collaboration among secretariats and organisations, including work on a joint information framework for forest reporting and on better information management.

A new UNEP project on development of issue-based modules to support coherent implementation of biodiversity-related MEAs has identified inland waters, invasive alien species, climate change and sustainable use as themes that it will address first, and these are all potential areas for joint thematic reporting. Other themes such as protected areas could be used to further develop such an approach. The Biodiversity Liaison Group established following decision VII/26 of the CBD Conference of Parties is a forum that could potentially look into this and agree further collaborative action.

In this context, joint work programmes between conventions and agreements could serve as sources of issues of common interest (although the thematic approach to harmonized reporting should not be restricted to bilateral approaches).

8. Coordination of reporting

A theme often returned to throughout the workshop was one of coordination. It was clear from the pilot project reports that increased coordination at the national level in both convention implementation and reporting was needed, and it was clear that increased collaboration between the convention secretariats on reporting-related issues would also be beneficial.

At the national level it was considered that meetings of focal points of different MEAs in each country needed to occur on a regular basis. It was also considered that increased coordination and harmonization should be addressed in any review of CBD National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, and other plans and strategies for implementation of conventions and agreements at the national level.

At the international level, the Biodiversity Liaison Group was considered a potential forum for fulfilling this coordinating role, with the support of appropriate international organizations and other experts. Also at the international level, coordination of donor action with respect to information management and reporting to international conventions and agreements may be appropriate.

There is also potential for increasing coordination at the regional level, for example in Europe where work is under way to ensure a coordinated approach to the development and use of 2010 indicators covering both the countries of the European Union and the wider pan-Europe.

9. Recommendations

Based on pilot project reports, on the presentations made at the workshop, and on the subsequent discussion, the workshop developed the following twelve recommendations for action.

- (i) **Purpose of reporting:** In the interests of increasing the efficiency of reporting, conventions and agreements should clarify and refine the information they need in order to assess implementation and outcomes. They should also address the balance between reporting on implementation and reporting on outcomes, particularly in the light of the 2010 target. When requesting reports, conventions and agreements should also explain clearly what the information will be used for and how it will be analysed.

(ii) Focus of reporting: Reporting should relate to the decisions taken by the governing bodies, both providing information to support the decision-making process, and reporting on actions taken to implement decisions and their effect. With this in mind, after each meeting of governing bodies, countries should disseminate the relevant parts of decisions and an analysis of their impacts to all Ministries which are affected by those decisions.

(iii) Coordination at international levels: The Biodiversity Liaison Group should consider establishing a technical task force to develop and promote a streamlined reporting agenda across conventions and agreements, taking account of the issues raised in the pilot projects and in this report, developments requested by governing bodies, and issues discussed during the EMG review mentioned earlier. The task force would comprise technical officers from the secretariats, supported as necessary by other appropriate experts. It is anticipated that the group and task force would work inter-sessionally to develop proposals which would be considered and adopted by governing bodies.

(iv) Coordination at the national level: At the national level, focal points for each of the biodiversity-related conventions and agreements should establish a mechanism appropriate to national circumstances to ensure coordination of all activities to do with implementation of international obligations at the national level, including reporting.

(v) Improving national information management: Countries should develop their capacity for managing information more effectively to support implementation of obligations, and for reporting. Such approaches should focus on enabling access to information and should build on the experience of the pilot projects, and use both existing tools (e.g. guidelines on biodiversity data management previously developed) or tools and networks that are being developed (e.g. the Global Biodiversity Information Facility or the Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network). Access to information necessary for implementation of, and reporting to, all biodiversity-related agreements through a single portal or clearing-house would significantly facilitate a more harmonized approach.

(vi) Information management guidelines: UNEP-WCMC should revisit the previously developed biodiversity data management guidelines, in order to support countries in achieving the previous recommendation. The guidelines should be revised in the light of experience from the pilot projects and other new developments in reporting and harmonization of reporting (including new developments in information and communications technology), reviewed and disseminated widely. UNEP-WCMC should seek to develop a project for potential GEF funding with countries on applying these guidelines to support both implementation and reporting, facilitating development of efficient information networks using a modular approach to information management.

(vii) Action by individual conventions: Conventions and agreements should also explore opportunities for taking concrete actions to reduce the reporting burden that they themselves control, for example by not adding new requests for information without removing existing requests in parallel, by reducing the amount of information requested, by linking reporting more closely to strategic planning, by exploring new mechanisms for reporting, and so on. This can be done within existing mandates given to most secretariats.

(viii) Thematic issues: Active consideration should be given to focusing on specific themes that are relevant across several conventions and agreements, and identifying means to harmonize approaches to information management and reporting, learning lessons from the CPF Task Force. Consideration might also be given to thematic reports on specific issues which would be relevant to all conventions and agreements which consider the issue. This may also be a matter for consideration by the Biodiversity Liaison Group.

(ix) Web portal on reporting: The convention secretariats and UNEP-WCMC should work together to develop and maintain a single, multilingual website (and perhaps also a CDROM) that links to existing questionnaires, guidelines and other instructions that secretariats have provided for national reporting, as well as results of the work on streamlining and harmonization. This

might also incorporate discussion fora and opportunities for sharing of experience. The Joint Web Site of the Biodiversity Related Conventions (currently hosted by CBD) should be investigated as a possible home for this.

(x) Capacity building: Capacity building activities for information management and reporting among local, national, regional and multilateral applications should focus on all three levels of capacity development: individual, institutional and systemic. It is also recommended that steps should be taken to ensure that the Global Environment Facility and the GEF Implementing Agencies take fully into account the coordination and information management required to support both implementation and reporting for the various MEAs when financing and implementing programmes.

(xi) Capacity building initiatives: Countries should actively consider the issue of information management to support implementation of and reporting on international obligations, when addressing the development of international initiatives such as the Intergovernmental Working Group on an Intergovernmental Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building, or the GEF National Capacity Self-Assessment Guidelines.

(xii) Dissemination of workshop results: UNEP-WCMC and the Chair of the workshop are requested to disseminate the results of the workshop widely, including:

- to the UNEP Executive Director, with a request that the report be circulated to the various UNEP divisions and to their regional offices
- to convention and agreement secretariats, with a request that the respective executive secretaries, secretary generals and directors send the document to their advisory and governing bodies, and to all national focal points
- to the Biodiversity Liaison Group, through formal communication from the workshop Chair
- on websites, including those of conventions and agreements, UNEP-WCMC and joint convention websites
- at appropriate events, including through delivering papers to meetings and conferences of the biodiversity-related conventions and agreements.

10. Participation

The following participated in the workshop, which was chaired by Peter Bridgewater, Secretary General of the Convention on Wetlands.

National ministries and agencies

Koen de Smet, Belgium
Els Martens, Belgium
Marc Peeters, Belgium
Janine van Vessem, Belgium
Ines Verleye, Belgium
Dirk Schwenzfeier, Germany
Patrick Kwabena Ofori-Danson, Ghana
Setyawan Warsono Adi, Indonesia
Tone Solhaug, Norway
Scott A Muller, Panama
Joseph François, Seychelles
Sarah Moon, United Kingdom
James Williams, United Kingdom

Convention and agreement secretariats

Peter Bridgewater, Convention on Wetlands
Marceil Yeater, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
Guy Debonnet, World Heritage Convention
Gerardo Fragoso, Convention on Migratory Species
Douglas Hykle, Convention on Migratory Species & IOSEA Marine Turtle MoU
Bob Kakuyo, Convention on Biological Diversity
Bert Lenten, African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement

International organizations and the European Commission

Stefan Leiner, European Commission
Anne Teller, European Commission
Gordon McInnes, European Environment Agency
Tiina Vähänen, FAO (for Collaborative Partnership on Forests)
Tony Gross, United Nations University
Maria Socorro Z. Manguiat, World Conservation Union

UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre

Jeremy Harrison
Elvina Henriette
Peter Herkenrath



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Observations of the CITES Secretariat

The CITES Secretariat's background document on reporting prepared for the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to be held in Bangkok during October 2004 (CoP13 Doc. 18, available on the CITES website) addresses the issue of harmonized reporting. Relevant sections are reproduced below.

[I]t seems timely for the Parties to consider ways in which separate reporting requirements – especially those that are species-specific – might be discontinued or consolidated, for example, within the annual and biennial reports. This initiative would fit within the overall programme to consolidate Resolutions and Decisions of the Conference of the Parties.

Consideration might also be given to revising Resolution Conf. 4.6 (Rev. CoP12) to urge Parties to take into account reporting implications when drafting resolutions and decisions that are to be submitted for consideration at meetings of the Conference of the Parties.

Another aspect of such consolidation extends beyond the Convention and seeks to harmonize CITES reporting with the reporting required under other biodiversity-related conventions. The Environmental Management Group (a UN system-wide policy coordination body chaired by UNEP, in which the CITES Secretariat participates) agreed at its sixth meeting (Geneva, February 2004) on a set of recommendations related to the harmonization of information management and reporting in biodiversity-related treaties. These included: a synchronization of national reporting cycles at the international level; establishment of an overarching modular framework, using the CBD national reporting requirements; harmonization of the way in which questions are phrased and the use of standard nomenclature and terminology; a 'Biodiversity Reporting Manual' to facilitate access to reporting requirements; broader joint programmes of work to tackle common themes; and evaluation of the results of and experience gained in the harmonization and streamlining of national reporting.

National pilot projects on the harmonization of reporting under biodiversity-related conventions, funded by UNEP in four different geographic regions, have shown that the development of a modular approach has merit. If adopted, the draft CITES biennial report format ... could be tested by Parties both as a reporting tool under the Convention and as a module that might be incorporated into a harmonized reporting structure for all biodiversity-related conventions (assuming that issues related to differing mandates and deadlines under various conventions are resolved). As the CITES annual report is quite unique, its potential for integration into such a harmonized structure is not evident but could also be explored.

Relevant extracts from the report of the Working Group on Reporting Requirements to the 50th meeting of the Standing Committee (Geneva, March 2004) are provided below.

As CITES annual reports focus specifically on trade, Working Group members did not really see the benefit of merging such CITES reports with those of other conventions. A national project on the

Funding for the workshop has been kindly provided by the following institutions:



harmonization of reporting carried out by the Seychelles came to a similar conclusion. With regard to biennial reports, the views of Working Group members were a bit mixed but no complete integration was desired at this time because of differing institutional mandates and reporting deadlines for various conventions.

Several of the Working Group members had had good experience with the Ramsar format, but it was felt that such a format (tick boxes and open boxes for comments, based on the Ramsar Strategic Plan) should only be applied to biennial reports and then in a much simpler way. UNEP-WCMC provided valuable background information on its work to develop for CMS a standard reporting format and search options that could be accessed through the Internet.

It was suggested that reporting-related items from the CITES Strategic Vision and Action Plan should be taken into account.

The report of an Expert Workshop on Promoting CITES-CBD Cooperation and Synergy (CoP13 Doc. 12.1.1) has been tabled by the European Union and Kenya for discussion at CoP13. A relevant extract again is provided below.

Following the recommendations of a workshop in October 2000 attended by eight Convention Secretariats (including CBD and CITES) and convened by UNEP, four pilot projects have been carried out in Ghana, Indonesia, Panama and Seychelles to test a variety of approaches to the harmonisation of national reporting under the biodiversity-related conventions, funded by UNEP¹. Eight Conventions and International Programmes were covered by one or more of the pilot projects. CITES was included in all the pilots and CBD in three of them.

The pilot reports as a whole demonstrated that:

- a) The 'modular' approach to harmonised reporting is practical and should be replicable in both developed and developing countries.*
- b) As well as facilitating more collaborative working between convention focal points at national level, efficient application of harmonised reporting should also release scarce resources for other conservation-related activities.*
- c) Further progress in realising the benefits of harmonised reporting depends on synchronisation of reporting cycles and the development of reporting formats to facilitate the modular approach.*

Participants were encouraged that there had at least been some tangible progress on harmonised reporting in the shape of the four pilot reports (available at: www.unep-wcmc.org). It was proposed that:

- As the next meeting due in the conference cycle, the 13th COP of CITES should be asked to give a clear mandate to allow Parties to meet their biennial reporting obligations under a harmonised format to be agreed with the governing bodies of other biodiversity-related conventions.*
- Successive COPs of CBD and the other biodiversity-related conventions should be asked to meet their reporting obligations under a harmonised format.*
- UNEP should continue to convene and facilitate the process and seek further endorsement for this by governments at the next UNEP Governing Council in February 2005.*
- UNEP should convene a follow-up workshop to consider the outcomes of the four pilot studies and refine the guidelines for the Parties.*
- One or more developed and further developing countries should also conduct pilot studies of harmonised reporting with effect from January 2005, taking into account the results of the follow-up workshop.*

¹ UK co-funded the Indonesian pilot project.



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Discussion paper 5: Do we need a Biodiversity Reporting Manual?

The pilot projects were faced with the need to examine the different reporting requirements for the biodiversity-related conventions. Out of this experience, it was stressed that a comprehensive overview of these requirements would be helpful. The development of a consolidated Biodiversity Reporting Manual would assist national focal points in reporting to the conventions and facilitate the way in which reporting is done. The manual could include: details of the reporting requirements under the biodiversity-related conventions; clear, concise guidelines/instructions on how to report; formats, notifications, links to previous reports *etc.* The objective of the document would be to build capacity for reporting and aid comparability of reports from various parties. It would be a global resource which could be adapted for regional (multistate) and national use. Development of the manual could begin with compiling the existing guiding documents from the various conventions and subsequently be further expanded. The manual should be made available on the Internet or/and CD-ROM, allowing access by national focal points and policy makers.

Key lessons from the pilot projects

- Staff in charge of national reporting would benefit from a manual as a guide to adequately draft the national reports. The manual would compile all relevant information, including decisions, guidelines, reporting formats and contacts.
- Once the use of such a manual becomes a common practice, a feedback mechanism should be established, enabling users (staff in charge of drafting the reports) to evaluate it and make suggestions and provide comments on any necessary amendments. Moreover, the level of use of the manual should be monitored in order to appraise whether it is indeed a useful tool.
- The Panamanian pilot project recommended a trial process of a basic version of the manual, with a limited timeframe allowing for evaluation of the results and the contribution of the manual to harmonizing and coordinating the drafting of national reports.

Recent developments

- The Collaborative Partnership on Forests Task Force on Streamlining Forest-related Reporting has established an internet-based portal on forest-related reporting, providing information on, *inter alia*:
 - The main forest-related reporting schemes of CPF member organisations, including, amongst others, the CBD and the Ramsar Convention
 - National reports previously submitted to CPF member organisations or their governing bodies
 - The work of the CPF Task Force.

Challenges and gaps

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Federal Ministry for the
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and Nuclear Safety



- If it is to be truly useful, such a manual would need to be kept up-to-date
- There is a lack of a clear and concise overview of reporting requirements for the different conventions
- Past reports should be made much more widely available
- The manual would need to be multilingual
- Collaboration of secretariats would be necessary in maintaining the manual.

Proposed next steps/future action

- Develop an internet- and CD-ROM-based reporting manual providing guidance on reporting formats and timetables, and links to key resources
- Test the reporting manual with countries and regions
- Develop regional (multistate) and national reporting manuals which link to the international one.