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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE AND NATURAL
HABITATS

Standing Committee

Meeting of the Bureau

Strasbourg, 28 April 2006

MEETING REPORT

*Secretariat Memorandum
prepared by
the Directorate of Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage*

1. Adoption of the agenda

Ms Véronique Herrenschildt, Chair of the Standing Committee of the Convention, opened the meeting on 28 April 2006 and welcomed the other Bureau members, Mr Jon Gunnar Ottosson, Vice-Chair, Ms Ilona Jepsena and the representatives of the Secretariat.

The draft agenda was adopted, as set out in Appendix 1. It was decided to deal with item 6 after item 3 and to include a wind farm project in Slovenia under “pending complaints”.

The participants are listed in Appendix 2.

2. General information

The representative of the Secretariat told the Bureau that Armenia had signed the convention on 13 March 2006. The ratification procedure was in progress.

Georgia was still considering the possibility of acceding to the convention.

The 4th intergovernmental conference “Biodiversity in Europe” had been held from 22 to 24 February 2006 in Plitvice Lakes National Park (Croatia). It was organised by the joint secretariat (UNEP/CoE) of the Pan-European Strategy for Biological Diversity (PEBLDS) and was aimed at preparing the European contribution to the 8th Conference of the Parties (COP-8) to the Convention on Biological Diversity, held in March 2006 in Curitiba (Brazil).

3. Implementation of the 2006 programme of activities

The representative of the Secretariat outlined progress on the work programme.

a. Ad hoc Working Group on wind energy and nature conservation

The group had met on 17 January 2006 at the European Commission to carry out further work on the guidelines.

A progress report would be submitted to the Standing Committee.

b. Group of Specialists for a European Strategy on Invertebrates

The group had met in Strasbourg on 10 February 2006.

In the light of the comments that had been made, the consultant, Mr John Haslett, would prepare a revised version of the draft strategy, which would be submitted to the national authorities and examined by the Group of Specialists in June 2006.

A final draft would be submitted to the Standing Committee for possible adoption in November 2006.

c. International conference on the conservation and sustainable development of the Danube Delta

This conference, organised at the invitation of the Ukrainian government, had been held in Odessa on 27 and 28 February 2006.

The conference was aimed at:

- assessing the current state of the Danube Delta, the various existing mechanisms for co-operation; and
- initiating the process of developing a common vision of the Danube delta among the 3 countries concerned.

It had been attended by experts from Moldova, Romania and the host country, as well as officials from international organisations (ICPDR, Unesco, Ramsar Bureau, European Union, Council of Europe, etc.).

A number of conclusions were adopted. The next step should be to hold a meeting at the invitation of the Romanian government, possibly in the autumn 2006.

d. Working Group for the preparation of a European charter on hunting and biodiversity

The working group had met in Strasbourg on 10 March 2006 to agree the group's terms of reference and the activities to be undertaken.

The consultant, Mr Massimo Marracci, would prepare an initial draft charter which would be submitted at the next meeting of the group, scheduled for 11 September 2006.

e. Conference on the implementation of the "Habitats" Directive and application of "favourable conservation status"

This conference was held in London, on 30 March 2006.

Ms Jepsena explained that the guidelines drawn up on the strict protection of species provided by the European Commission's "Habitats" Directive were based on the case-law of the European Court of Justice. The interpretation of certain provisions of the Directive could be useful when applying Article 9 of the Bern Convention, which contained similar terms to those of Article 12 of the Directive.

f. International conference on marine turtles

The Bern Convention had contributed to the international conference on marine turtles which had been held in Crete from 2 to 8 April 2006, by covering the expenses of a number of participants.

g. Group of experts on the conservation of amphibians and reptiles

The Group of Experts would meet on 4 and 5 May 2006, mainly for the purpose of examining 5 draft Action plans.

h. Invasive alien species

A workshop on invasive alien species would be held in Zagreb (Croatia) from 22 to 24 May 2006. In addition, a consultant, Ms Clare Shine, had been given the task of preparing a report on existing tools for banning or restricting trade in invasive alien species.

i. Climate change

An informal meeting on climate change would be held on 16 May 2006 in Peterborough (United Kingdom). The aims were to set the terms of reference for the Group of Experts which was to meet in 2007 and to examine the draft recommendation whose adoption had been postponed by the Standing Committee at its previous meeting.

j. International action plan for the conservation of the European sturgeon

A meeting to prepare this action plan would be held on 3 and 4 July 2006 near Bordeaux (France).

k. Emerald Network

On 12 June, an informal meeting would be held in Strasbourg to examine the strategic study on action to be taken by the convention and the Emerald Network in Africa and in the Mediterranean region, conducted by Mr Hervé Lethier.

The Secretariat gave a progress report on the implementation of the Emerald Network.

Under the pilot projects programme, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia and Montenegro had submitted the final report on the pilot project to the Secretariat. Reminders had been sent out to the authorities responsible for the pilot projects under way in Senegal and Burkina Faso, encouraging them to complete the pilot projects as the agreed timeframes have expired.

The Secretariat gave a progress report on the programme to develop the Emerald Network being implemented in five southern European countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and Serbia and Montenegro) with funding from the European Environment Agency (EEA) under a contract between the EEA and the Council of Europe. The programme aims to identify 80% of the sites in these countries by the end of 2006 and is expected to produce the following results:

- distribution per biogeographic region, in each country, of all species and habitats referred to in Resolutions Nos. 4 and 6 of the Bern Convention and Annexes I and II of the Habitats Directive;
- distribution map of selected species and habitats in GIS;
- sites database for 80% of the sites to be listed, with 60% of all ecological data filled in;
- digital boundaries for all sites selected.

The programme is implemented in co-operation with national authorities, the Emerald technical teams already set up and the focal points of the EEA.

The Secretariat suggested that this kind of co-operation could be extended to the South Caucasus states (Russian Caucasus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), with the co-operation and financial support of the European Commission and the EEA.

1. Implementation of the Bern Convention in Spain

A report on the implementation of the convention in Spain is being prepared.

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The Bureau noted with approval the progress made in implementing the work programme.

4. Amendment of the Rules of Procedure of the Standing Committee

As decided by the Standing Committee at its previous meeting, the Bureau discussed the matter of enlargement. It examined the following issues:

- the financial implications of a possible enlargement;
- the status of Bureau members;
- the decision-making process of the Bureau.

The Bureau instructed the Secretariat to look at the bureaux of other conventions to see how they operate and decided to discuss the matter further at its next meeting.

5. Application of the Convention - Files

5.1. Specific sites – Files open

a. Akamas Peninsula (Cyprus)

At its previous meeting, the Standing Committee had congratulated the Cypriot government for the Council of Ministers decision concerning a management proposal for the Akamas peninsula, which took account of all the suggestions made in Recommendation No. 63 (1997).

It had decided to leave the file open so that it could confirm final approval and progress in implementing the relevant protective measures.

The Cypriot authorities had told the Secretariat that there was nothing new to report. Meetings were being held to explain the decision to the various political parties and to enlist their support.

The Bureau instructed the Secretariat to ask the Cypriot authorities whether this proposal had been examined by Parliament.

b. Project to build a motorway through the Kresna gorge (Bulgaria)

The Standing Committee had decided, at its last meeting, to leave the file open.

There was nothing new to report.

c. The Danube-Black Sea canal project in the Bystroe Estuary (Danube delta, Ukraine)

Having been informed of the possibility that work might resume, against the advice of the Standing Committee, the Secretariat had written to the Ukrainian authorities.

In their reply, it had been pointed out that all the work undertaken was part of Phase 1, and that the scope of the work to be carried out in Phase 2 would be revised on the basis of a new plan and environmental monitoring data.

The environmental impact assessment for Phase 2 had been completed and submitted to the Ukrainian Ministry of the Environment.

As promised, an international workshop would be held to discuss the results of the environmental impact assessment.

The Ukrainian authorities had reiterated the importance they attached to environmental monitoring.

5.2. Possible new files

a. Wind farm in the Balchik area – Via Pontica (Bulgaria)

At its previous meeting, the Standing Committee had adopted Recommendation No. 117 (2005) on the plan to set up a wind farm near the town of Balchik and other wind farm developments on the Via Pontica route. In this Recommendation, the Bulgarian government had been asked to reconsider its decision to approve the proposed wind farm in Balchik, given its potential impact on wildlife and Bulgaria's obligations under the convention.

The Committee had further decided to keep this question on the potential file list.

The Bulgarian government has informed the Secretariat that there is no legal basis for reviewing the decision to approve the project. It has also provided the following information:

- an ecological assessment of the National Programme for encouraging the use of renewable energies (2004-2015) was to be carried out;
- any proposed spending on wind farm projects situated within the boundaries of potential Natura 2000 sites should be subject to an environmental impact assessment;
- it is planned to hold a workshop to look at the ecological requirements for building wind farms.

The Secretariat told the Bureau of a similar case reported by NGOs involving plans to build a group of 129 windmills 20 km from Balchik, between the town of Kavarna and the Kaliakra Cape.

The Bulgarian authorities believe that the whole procedure for approving the project is in keeping with the law: in addition, measures to mitigate the impact have been proposed. The Secretariat restated the Standing Committee's position, which was that all projects along the Via Pontica should be dealt with as part of a comprehensive approach.

The Bureau took note of this information. It voiced deep concern about the government's decision not to withdraw permission for the Balchik project. It instructed the Secretariat to send the Bulgarian government the revised version of the draft guidelines on wind farms.

It decided to consider the matter further at its next meeting.

b. Conservation of the Hermann tortoise in the Massif and Plaine des Maures (France)

At its previous meeting, the Standing Committee had adopted Recommendation No. 118 (2005) on the protection of the Hermann tortoise in the Massif des Maures and Plaine des Maures localities, which asked the French government to apply a more global management concept for the landscape areas concerned by the presence of the Hermann tortoise and to reject the new application for extension of the Balançon waste storage centre as it stood.

The Bureau noted this information with approval.

Ms Herrenschmidt told the Bureau that the extension zone for the Balançon waste storage centre had been moved; the permission granted was for a 5 hectare site situated in degraded habitat; a biotope

protection order had been issued; and the Prefect planned to hold a meeting with all the partners involved to discuss a global management scheme for the area.

5.3. Pending complaints

a. Ski resort in San Glorio (Spain)

The Secretariat had received a complaint from the IBA Association (*Association for Bear Research and Management*) concerning the construction of a ski resort in San Glorio, in the Cantabrian Mountains, in an area inhabited by brown bears.

The project is likely to affect two populations which are remnants of the main population of brown bear, once very widespread.

The Secretariat had written to the Spanish authorities, asking for information. It had not yet received a reply.

b. Protection of the common hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*) in Alsace (France)

The Secretariat of the Bern Convention had received a letter from the “Sauvegarde Faune Sauvage” association, complaining that not enough resources were being put into preserving the habitats required for the survival of the common hamster.

The Standing Committee had already adopted several recommendations on the protection of the common hamster in Alsace [Recommendation No. 68 (1998)] and in Europe [Recommendation No. 79 (1999)].

The Secretariat had written to the French authorities asking for information but had not yet received a reply.

Ms Herrenschmidt informed the Bureau that a reply would be sent to the Secretariat very shortly.

The Bureau instructed the Secretariat to ask the countries mentioned in Recommendation No. 79 (1999) as having reduced or declining populations to send information on the status of their hamster populations.

It decided to consider this matter further at its next meeting.

c. Protection of the green toad (*Bufo viridis*) in Alsace (France)

Following a complaint from BUFO (Association for the study and the protection of amphibians and reptiles in Alsace) about the inadequate nature of the impact studies carried out in connection with the Oberschaeffolsheim and Wolfisheim bypass project, and the Zénith construction project, the Secretariat had written to the French authorities, asking them about these issues.

In its Recommendation No. 27 (1991), the Standing Committee had asked the French government to “*ensure, by the most appropriate means, protection and management of the few remaining habitats of Bufo viridis in the Alsace and Lorraine regions; limit the change of breeding ponds into fish ponds;*”.

It was expected that the Secretariat would receive a reply very shortly.

d. Project on imprinting the Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*) in Sweden

The Secretariat of the Bern Convention had received a letter from the Director General responsible for Forestry and the Natural Environment of Greece, challenging the decision by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to approve the *Aktion Zwerggans* project, designed to guide Lesser White-fronted Geese to new, safer wintering grounds in Germany.

Among other things, the complaint cited:

- The manipulation of natural migration routes, using microlight aircraft;
- The fact that every winter, Greece played host to the entire European wild population nesting in Norway;
- The issue of genetic purity;
- The international action plan prepared by the AEWA and the European Commission.

The Secretariat had written to the Swedish government, asking for information.

In their reply, the Swedish authorities justified the project, citing the fact that the species had suffered a sharp decline in Europe and Russia in recent years, and was expected to decline further over the next ten years.

Since 1980, Sweden had been taking steps to remedy the situation. As well as the main migration routes, a small number of Lesser White-fronted Geese of unknown origin had been observed in Germany and Spain.

Reintroduction has been seen as a potentially useful tool for halting and reversing the current trend. After consulting the authorities and relevant NGOs, it had been decided to launch the pilot project in 2006-2007. It is still too early to give an assessment of the microlight aircraft method.

Pending the adoption of the new international action plan, the pilot project should provide important information about ways of restoring populations that had been wiped out and/or rebuilding small populations.

The conservation status of the Lesser White-fronted Goose of Fennoscandia requires that steps be taken to improve their protection and management along the migration routes from their breeding sites to their wintering grounds in the Evros delta in Greece.

Based on the results of the first year of the experiment, the SEPA keeps open the option of reconsidering – or even withdrawing – its approval.

The Swedish authorities do not consider that the project is likely to interfere with the conservation of the Lesser White-fronted Goose populations of Fennoscandia.

The Bureau took note of this information. It asked the Secretariat to send the reply to Norway, which was also affected by the project. It considered it advisable to seek the scientific opinion of the AEW (African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement) and decided to discuss the matter further at its next meeting.

e. Wind farm project in Volovja Reber (Slovenia)

The Secretariat had received a joint complaint from 24 NGOs concerning the construction of a group of 43 wind turbines in southern Slovenia, in the Alpine and Dinaric region. The chosen site was of vital importance for various species protected under the Bern Convention (Eurasian lynx, wildcat, brown bear, etc) and also acted as a corridor.

The Secretariat had written to the Slovenian authorities, asking for information.

A full report will be sent to the Secretariat shortly.

The Bureau instructed the Secretariat to send a copy of the guidelines to the Slovenian government. It decided to put this project on the agenda for its next meeting.

5.4. Other information

a. Hunting of the edible dormouse (*Glis glis*) in Slovenia

At the 6th international conference on the dormouse, held in Siedlece (Poland), participants had voiced concern at the trapping that still takes place in Slovenia and a complaint had been filed with the Secretariat by *Royal Holloway*, University of London.

The Secretariat had written to the Slovenian government, asking for information. In their reply, the authorities had pointed out that the trapping in question was a traditional activity in Slovenia. Under the new Hunting Act (2004), the edible dormouse is classed as a wild species: the hunting season runs from 1 October until 30 November, and trapping is permitted.

Under Slovenia's international obligations, the competent minister (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food) could take additional conservation measures.

Management plans are drawn up and monitoring carried out for all wild species. The Slovenian authorities believe that the conservation status of dormouse is satisfactory, and that the current situation is fully in keeping with the Bern Convention.

The Bureau instructed the Secretariat to find out whether it was the decline in the population that had prompted the complaint and to ask the complainant to provide further information.

b. Conservation of the Mediterranean horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus euryale*) in the “Ajdovska jama pri Nemški vasi” cave in Slovenia

In 2004, the attention of the Secretariat had been drawn to a plan to exhibit archaeological discoveries in the Ajdovska jama pri Nemški vasi cave, which was considered to be a site of major importance for *Rhinolophus euryale* colonies.

In the light of the information provided by the Slovenian authorities, the Bureau had decided to put the complaint on file and had asked to be kept informed of any follow-up. The status of the populations was being monitored on a regular basis. The number of bats was the same as in 1996 (300-400). The monitoring was being carried out by the Centre for Cartography of Fauna and Flora.

Krško Town Council, which is responsible for managing the cave, is keeping to the terms of the agreement that had been concluded on the basis of an expert opinion and which concerned visiting arrangements.

Even though the conservation status of the colony is satisfactory, it is planned to grant the site permanent protection, in view of the potential threats.

The Bureau thanked the Slovenian authorities for this follow-up report.

c. Caves in the Thrace region (Turkey)

Back in 2003, the Secretariat’s attention had been drawn to tourism development plans liable to harm the bat populations in a group of caves in north-western Turkey.

The case has been submitted to the Standing Committee as a possible file.

On the basis of the information provided by the government and the measures taken to control tourism, the Standing Committee had decided at its 24th meeting not to open a file.

Since then, the Turkish authorities had sent the Secretariat details of the outcome of the visits organised at the end of the breeding season, together with the reports.

Tourism does not seem to be having an adverse impact on the caves.

Various recommendations have been made to improve the situation further (better signposting, introduction of a new scheme to monitor the impact of tourism, etc).

The Bureau noted this report with approval and thanked the Turkish authorities for keeping it informed.

6. Follow-up to the recommendations – Developments in the situation

a. Follow-up to Recommendation No. 95 (2002) on the conservation of marine turtles in Kazanlı (Turkey)

The Secretariat has not received any further information from the Turkish authorities concerning implementation of the recommendation.

In 2004, the Standing Committee had decided to close the file on a provisional basis.

In 2005, NGOs had once again expressed concern at developments in the situation, arguing that some problems still needed addressing, such as:

- The complete demolition of the jetty;
- a tourism development plan approved without a preliminary environmental impact assessment; and
- the removal of highly toxic waste from the beach.

The Bureau instructed the Secretariat to ask the Turkish government for a detailed report on action taken on the implementation of the recommendation.

It decided to review the situation at its next meeting.

b. Follow-up to Recommendation No. 108 (2003) on the proposed construction of the “Via Baltica” (Poland)

No further information has been received since the previous meeting of the Standing Committee.

The expert who had visited the site in 2003 could, subject to approval by the Polish authorities, use a forthcoming visit to Poland in connection with the European Diploma for protected areas to meet with the authorities concerned and discuss recent developments, in particular progress on the strategic environmental assessment.

The Bureau approved the Secretariat’s proposal.

c. Follow-up to Recommendation No. 112 (2004) on hydro-electric dams in Kárahnjúkar and Nordlingaalda (Iceland)

A full report will be submitted by the Icelandic government in time for the next meeting of the Standing Committee.

d. Follow-up to Recommendation No. 113 (2004) on the installation of a new antenna (Pluto II) in the Sovereign Base Areas (Akrotiri, Cyprus)

The British authorities have provided an update on the implementation of the recommendation, in particular:

- the results of the study on the effects of electromagnetic radiation on health have been published;
- progress had been made on numerous fronts, in particular:
 - in introducing devices to deter birds;
 - in preparing the environmental management plan for the Akrotiri peninsula; a workshop aimed at all parties involved was to be held in May 2006 ;
- an on-island environmentalist’s post had been created;
- studies on bird mortality and bird flight paths, hydrological and hydrogeological studies (in connection with the situation in the Phasouri Marsh) were to be carried out.

An update will be provided at the next meeting of the Standing Committee.

The Bureau noted the information with interest.

7. Other business

✓ **Bird flu**

The Secretariat outlined the document which it had prepared on the steps taken by the various international organisations (see Appendix 3 to this report).

The Bureau felt it was important to keep this matter under close review.

✓ **Biodiversity conservation in the Azov-Black-Sea Corridor**

The Secretariat informed the Bureau that it had drafted a letter to be signed by the Chair, following the decision by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to suspend work on the eco-corridor project presented by the Ukrainian delegate at the previous meeting of the Standing Committee.

✓ **Follow-up to COP-8**

The Bureau decided to examine at its next meeting the proposals made at COP-8 in order to identify possible courses of action.

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The next meeting will be held on 8 September 2006.

The Chair thanked the participants and declared the meeting closed.



APPENDIX 1
CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Strasbourg, 13 April 2006

Standing Committee
Bureau meeting

Strasbourg, 28 April 2006
(Room 16, opening : 9.30 am)

DRAFT AGENDA

- 1. Adoption of the agenda**
- 2. General information**
- 3. Implementation of the 2006 Programme of activities**
- 4. Amendment of the Rules of Procedure of the Standing Committee to enlarge its Bureau**
- 5. Implementation of the Convention : Files**
 - 5.1 Specific Sites - Files open**
 - Cyprus: Akamas peninsula
 - Bulgaria: project to build a motorway through the Kesna Gorge
 - Ukraine: proposed navigable waterway in the Bystroe Estuary (Danube delta)
 - 5.2 Possible files**
 - Bulgaria: Wind farm in the Balchik area –Via Pontica
 - France: Conservation of the Hermann tortoise in the plaine des Maures
 - 5.3 On-the-spot appraisal**
 - 5.4 Complaints in stand-by and other information**
 - Spain: Ski resort in San Glorio
 - France: Habitats for the survival of the common hamster and the green toad
 - Sweden: Project on imprinting Lesser White-fronted goose (*Anser erythropus*) and ultralight planes
 - 5.5 Other information**
 - Slovenia: Hunting of edible dormouse (*Glis glis*), and monitoring of the Mediterranean horseshoe bat in the cave “Ajdovska jama pri Newmski vasi”
 - Turkey: Monitoring of bat populations in the caves of Thrace
- 6. Follow-up of the Recommendations - Evolution of the situation in:**
 - Recommendation No.95 (2002) on the conservation of marine turtles in Kazanlı (Turkey)
 - Recommendation No.108 (2003) on the proposed construction of the “Via Baltica” (Poland)
 - Recommendation No. 112 (2004) on hydro-electric dams in Iceland
 - Recommendation No.113 (2004) on military antenna in the Sovereign Base Area of Akrotiri (Cyprus)
- 7. Any Other Business**



APPENDIX 2

Strasbourg, le le 19 avril 2006
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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS
CONVENTION RELATIVE A LA CONSERVATION DE LA VIE SAUVAGE
ET DU MILIEU NATUREL

Standing Committee / Comité permanent

Meeting of the Bureau / Réunion du Bureau

Strasbourg, le 28 avril 2006
Palais de l'Europe, Salle 16

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APPENDIX 3

Initiatives taken by the different international organisations

Avian influenza

Summary of actions and initiatives by other international organisations

- *The role of migratory birds - although probably significant in the recent spread to parts of Europe – has been grossly exaggerated in the media, for example through misleading maps when in fact **there is no real evidence that avian influenza has spread systematically along major migratory flyways.***

CMS Secretariat, 2006

The CMS Secretariat has emphasised the **very slow rate of H5N1 penetration in Africa**, despite its crucial position on North-South flyways, which may be explained by the reduced levels of intensive poultry farming in much of the region. Attention has also been drawn to the **dangers of culling wild birds or reducing natural wetland habitats**. Apart from the damage to conservation, **both measures would be counter-productive**: culling would encourage potentially diseased birds to scatter and increase human risks, whilst reducing wetlands would force wild birds to share areas also used by domestic poultry, again increasing the risks of spreading avian influenza.

- *The participants indicated that **SBSTTA could be requested to further assess the interlinkages between ecosystem health**, in particular human induced ecosystem disturbances including climate change and variability, **and the risks and spread of avian influenza caused by HPAI H5N1 virus and other pathogens, in humans and animals.***

Report of the meeting on the impact of avian influenza on wildlife, March 2006

- *Avian influenza is an infectious viral disease in poultry and birds, causing mortality and disturbances which can quickly take epizootic proportions **liable to present a serious threat to animal and public health.** There is a risk that the disease agent might be spread from wild to domestic birds, notably poultry, and from country to country through the **international trade** in live birds or their products.*

European Commission, 2006.

- *Cats, tigers and leopards are known to have been infected with the H5N1 virus in Asia and Europe, but there is a lack of evidence that domestic cats play a role in transmitting the virus. **More research needs to be undertaken to determine the role of cats and other carnivores in the epidemiology of avian influenza.***

New York Times, 6 April 2006 (reporting on an article published in the journal *Nature*)

The **Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)** and the **World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)**, in collaboration with the **World Health Organisation**, have published a *Global Strategy for the Progressive Control of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza* (November 2005), a response to the recommendations made during the 2nd FAO/OIE Regional Meeting on Avian Influenza Control in Ho Chi Minh City (23-25 February 2005). The **FAO** has also proposed *A Global Programme of avian influenza control and eradication* (March 2006), which is result of discussions between **FAO, OIE and World Bank** partners, all of whom are playing a substantial global role in support to the livestock sector.

The **World Health Organisation** focuses on: (i) a phase-wise strategy to respond to the avian pandemic threat (*Recommended strategic actions*, 2005); (ii) a preparedness plan and a checklist for preparedness planning, that aimed at preparing countries to recognize and manage an influenza pandemic (November 2005); (iii) a draft protocol for rapid response and containment (March 2006); and (iv) a global communication network - The Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) - whose purpose is to pool human and technical resources for a rapid response.

In addition, the **OIE** has presented Recommendations for the Control of Avian Influenza in Europe, as a result from the meeting on highly pathogenic avian influenza in Paris (27-28 February 2006). They are also working on a project aimed at supporting the Veterinary Services of developing countries to meet **OIE** international quality standards.

The Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) adopted Resolutions 3.18 and 8.27 in 2005 presenting conclusions, requests and specific instructions for the understanding of the virus pathway, the control of its transmission and behaviour and also for the monitoring of the virus in wild birds community. The importance of further research and the disastrous long-term consequences of ill-informed responses for conservation are also emphasized.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and AEWA have adopted resolutions on avian influenza during their Conference of the Parties in late 2005. Solutions include tackling unsustainable and unhygienic poultry husbandry practices; developing higher standards and new biosecurity measures; reducing the interface between wild water fowl and domestic fowl and improved surveillance of the virus in wild birds, as well as national action plans and public awareness programmes

In August 2005, CMS established a **Scientific Task Force on Avian Flu**, which now includes 13 UN bodies, biodiversity treaties and specialist NGOs. The guiding principle of the Task Force is that the best chance of avoiding a further mutation of H5N1 that could lead to a pandemic affecting millions of humans is to take measures addressing the root causes and based on the best possible knowledge.

The Task Force focuses on obtaining the best scientific advice on the conservation impact of the spread of H5N1, assessing the role of migratory birds as vectors and victims of the virus, and issuing advice on the root causes of the epidemic as well as technically sound measures to combat it and develop early warning expertise.

The Task Force has addressed public statements to the media and more specialist audiences. Task Force members have consistently emphasized evidence that Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza is being spread by methods including trade in poultry and its products; legal and illegal trade in wild and captive bred birds; human movements; and cross-infection between poultry and migratory water birds.

CMS Executive Secretary Robert Hepworth gave evidence to a hearing on avian influenza at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Paris on 27 March 2006. He emphasised the need to intensify research activities: "In order to fight the epidemic effectively, the virus behaviour in waterbirds needs to be further investigated. Monitoring the prevalence of highly pathogenic avian influenza in wild birds is also necessary. In addition, the transmission from wild birds to domestic flocks and vice versa requires further clarification". There is an impact of avian influenza on Europe's biodiversity, and a number of threatened Eurasian migratory birds are at particular risk from avian influenza.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), in cooperation with CMS and its Agreement on the conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA), organized a **Scientific Seminar on Avian Influenza, the Environment and Migratory Birds (Nairobi, 10-11 April 2006)**. The Seminar aimed at reviewing the latest scientific studies concerning the evolution and spread of HPAI and its impact on wild birds and the wider environment. The Seminar's final conclusions and recommendations included the following:

- HPAI H5N1 is considered to have spread between countries by many different vectors, including through the movement of avian livestock and migrating waterbirds, and that evidence of causal links is often lacking. High standards of poultry biosecurity remains central to the reduction of infection risk.

- Early detection is essential for the control or eradication of H5N1. Importance of ensuring adequate surveillance and rapid reporting and data-sharing systems.
- Importance of rapid reporting and control measures; data collection on trade issues; the development of compensation policies for agricultural losses and impacts on protected areas; effective communication with the media, the public and policy-makers using scientific facts.
- Call for additional research on prevalence of H5N1 in wild bird populations; existing ringing data to assess migratory systems; the ecology of the virus in the environment; natural mortality levels in wild bird populations; wild bird susceptibility to H5N1; and effective measures to reduce transmission of the virus between wild birds and poultry.
- Ecosystem degradation has played a role in the evolution and spread of H5N1 and participants urged the development, in collaboration with FAO, of mechanisms to restructure agriculture production systems aimed at reducing stresses on ecosystems and risks to human health.
- Asked the Scientific Task Force, as a matter of urgency, **to promote the implementation of the Seminar's conclusions and recommendations both within participating organisations and among others.** They suggested that a review of the work of the Task Force, including the Seminar's conclusions and recommendations, be communicated to the UN Special Coordinator for Avian Influenza. Participants asked the CMS to review the terms of reference and membership of the Task Force, consider its future priorities, and examine potential cooperation with and support from other bodies.

The **Convention on Biological Diversity** held a brainstorming meeting on the impact of avian influenza on wildlife. The conclusions of this meeting were in line with the recommendations of **FAO**, **OIE** and **WHO** and the meeting also appreciated the Resolutions adopted by CMS COP8, AEWA MOP3 and Ramsar COP9.

Cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza of the subtype virus H5N1 are suspected or confirmed in several EU countries. The **European Commission** has taken several decisions concerning preventive and control measures in relation to highly pathogenic avian influenza in wild birds in the community (2006/115/EC) and on avian influenza in poultry (2006/135/EC). These precautionary and protection measures aim at controlling the spread of the virus after the discovery of an outbreak. Preventive measures are taken with regard to zoo birds. An extension of the imports bans for several countries has been agreed, among other measures, by the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health.

The **World Conservation Union (IUCN)** has urged governments to tackle the root causes of shared animal-human diseases and calls therefore for several measures, in line with other organizations (November 2005).

Annex

THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP)

⇒ **Scientific Seminar on Avian Influenza, the Environment and Migratory Birds** (Nairobi, 10-11 April 2006).

Recommendations:

- Surveillance, early warning, risk assessment
- Priority short-terms needs
- Long-terms needs
- Collaboration and cooperation
- Next steps

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY: SUBSIDIARY BODY ON SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVICE (SBSTTA)

⇒ **Brainstorming meeting on the impact of avian influenza on wildlife**

The main conclusions of the brainstorming meeting, attended by 53 participants including representative's numbers of governments and organisations dealing with the avian influenza, are in line with the recommendations of FAO, OIE and WHO. The meeting also appreciated the Resolutions adopted by CMS COP8, AEWA MOP3 and Ramsar COP9.

THE WORLD CONSERVATION UNION (IUCN)

⇒ **IUCN brief – Avian influenza**, November 2005

IUCN urges government to tackle the root causes of all shared animal-human diseases rather the reacting exclusively to the current epidemy. In a report of November 2005, the IUCN, in line with other organisation, calls for the following of several measures based on years of experience and research.

IUCN calls for the following of these measures:

- Increase the knowledge of wildlife biology
- Increase international cooperation (for example formal communication channels)
- Improve regulations for international trade in animal products and wildlife
- Monitor wildlife health
- Educate people working with domesticated and wild animals on the health risk involved and best practice to prevent disease outbreaks

CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS (CMS)

⇒ **Resolution 3.18 and 8.27.**

Summary of the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza recommendations and solutions:

- The Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza has demonstrated how the role of migratory birds has been grossly exaggerated by the media and that the extensive global and local movements of live poultry products are crucial in transmitting the virus. Infected captive birds and human movements provide two other transmission routes.
- The culling of wild birds and the reducing of wetlands habitats are measures that can be dangerous because counterproductive.
- Solutions include tackling unsustainable and unhygienic poultry husbandry practices; developing high standards and new biosecurity measures; reducing the interface between wild water fowl and domestic fowl and improve surveillance of the virus in wild birds; establish a national action plan and public awareness programmes.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION DECISIONS RELATING TO AVIAN INFLUENZA

⇒ **Precautionary measures** in relation to highly pathogenic avian influenza in wild birds in the community (2006/115) and on avian influenza in poultry (2006/135).

Precautionary measures:

- Establishment of a protection zone (3 km) and a surveillance zone (10 km) around the outbreak area
- Poultry must be kept indoors and movement of poultry is banned (with some exceptions)
- On-farm biosecurity measures must be strengthened
- Hunting of wild birds is banned
- Diseased awareness of poultry owners and family must be carried out

⇒ **Vaccination and other measures of zoo birds** have been submitted in several Member States.

⇒ **Import bans expanded** in several countries (Romania, Turkey, Croatia and developing countries).

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANISATION (FAO)

⇒ **Proposal for a Global Programme of avian influenza control and eradication**, March 2006.

This document presents FAO's vision of the global needs for control of the current panzootic of HPAI. This Proposal was developed following extensive discussion between FAO, OIE and World Bank partners all of whom are playing a substantial global role in support to the livestock sector.

A brief description of the goals, objectives, activities, proposed projects, expected impact and budget estimations are presented for each of the four main components of the Programme:

- global and regional coordination of the programme

- support to infected countries in their efforts to control the disease
- assistance to countries at risk of introduction of the disease and finally
- provision for immediate support for any newly infected country to ensure a quick and effective control programme

⇒ **A Global Strategy for the Progressive Control of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)**,
November 2005, in collaboration with OIE and WHO.

This document was produced in response to the recommendation made during the 2nd
FAO/OIE Regional Meeting on Avian Influenza Control in Asia (23-25 February 2005) held in Ho Chi
Minh City, Viet Nam.

The global strategy will be implemented over three time frames:

- Immediate to short (1-3 years): aim to reduce the risk to humans by preventing further spread of HPAI in those countries that are currently infected by H5N1. Of these, the focus has been on Viet Nam, Cambodia and Thailand, and is now centered on Indonesia.
- Short to medium (4-6 years).
- Medium to long term (7-10 years): a more focused approach to HPAI control can be mounted to progressively eradicate the disease from the remaining compartments of infected domestic terrestrial poultry in the region of Viet Nam, Southern PR China and the island of Java.

During this period the spread of HPAI, mainly of the H5N1 strain, will have been progressively controlled in domestic poultry of all infected countries of Asia, Eastern Europe, and prevented from affecting those other regions and countries not currently infected, but at high risk.

WORLD ORGANISATION FOR ANIMAL HEALTH (OIE)

⇒ **Recommendation - Control of avian influenza in Europe.**

19 recommendations resulted from the meeting on highly pathogenic avian influenza in Europe, held in
Paris the 27-28 February 2006.

Among these recommendations are:

- the endorsement of the declaration of the Beijing conference related to veterinary measures to be taken for the control of avian influenza
- the preparation of emergency plans by every Member Countries
- the apply of a vaccination strategy in certain countries or situation at risk
- the Veterinary Service must be on the front line of avian flu prevention and control
- the report of Members Countries to the OIE on their findings of the highly pathogenic H5N1 in wild birds and on the measures taken to prevent transmission of disease to domestic birds

⇒ **Ensuring good governance to address emerging and re-emerging animal disease threats - Supporting the Veterinary Services of Developing Countries to Meet OIE International Standards on Quality.**

The proposals presented are aimed at helping those developing countries facing the greatest threats to have an effective Veterinary Service capable of detecting animal disease outbreaks as soon as they occur and responding rapidly to bring the diseases immediately under control. These proposals are aimed at bringing the VS into line with international standards in terms of governance, organisation and functioning, and include an active partnership with the private sector. The program will be implemented in partnership with FAO.

The project will be described along two main lines:

- Actions to be implemented, according to the degree of urgency (in the short term, medium term or long term)
- At the most appropriate levels of coordination for the different actions proposed (global, regional, national).

WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION (WHO)

⇒ **WHO pandemic influenza draft protocol for rapid response and containment**

The protocol has three main parts: (i) the steps needed to recognize the signal or “triggering” event; (ii) the immediate actions that should follow recognition of the signal; and (iii) the actions that should be undertaken once the event has been verified, the overall situation has been assessed, and a decision has been made to launch the rapid containment operation. The annexes describe the roles and responsibilities of countries and WHO for rapid response and containment and WHO operational communications.

⇒ **WHO checklist for influenza pandemic preparedness planning and WHO global influenza preparedness plan.**

The objective of pandemic planning is to enable countries to be prepared to recognize and manage an influenza pandemic. The aim of the checklist is primarily to provide an outline of the essential minimum elements of preparedness.

The pandemic preparedness checklist has been divided into the following main sections:

- Preparing for an emergency
- Surveillance
- Case investigation and treatment
- Preventing spread of the disease in the community
- Maintaining essential services
- Research and evaluation
- Implementation, testing and revision of the national plan

The WHO global influenza preparedness plan is an update that replaces the *Influenza pandemic plan* from 1999. Six phases of the pandemic period are described and for each phases, overarching goals, objectives and actions for WHO and national authorities are presented.

Phases	Overarching public health goals
<p>Interpandemic period</p> <p>Phase 1. No new influenza virus subtypes have been detected in humans. An influenza virus subtype that has caused human infection may be present in animals. If present in animals, the risk of human infection or disease is considered to be low.</p> <p>Phase 2. No new influenza virus subtypes have been detected in humans. However, a circulating animal influenza virus subtype poses a substantial risk of human disease.</p> <p>Pandemic alert period</p> <p>Phase 3. Human infection(s) with a new subtype, but no human-to-human spread, or at most rare instances of spread to a close contact.</p> <p>Phase 4. Small cluster(s) with limited human-to-human transmission but spread is highly localized, suggesting that the virus is not well adapted to humans.</p> <p>Phase 5. Larger cluster(s) but human-to-human spread still localized, suggesting that the virus is becoming increasingly better adapted to humans, but may not yet be fully transmissible (substantial pandemic risk).</p> <p>Pandemic period</p> <p>Phase 6. Pandemic: increased and sustained transmission in general population.</p>	<p>Strengthen influenza pandemic preparedness at the global, regional, national and subnational levels</p> <p>Minimize the risk of transmission to humans; detect and report such transmission rapidly if it occurs.</p> <p>Ensure rapid characterization of the new virus subtype and early detection, notification and response to additional cases.</p> <p>Contain the new virus within limited foci or delay spread to gain time to implement preparedness measures, including vaccine development.</p> <p>Maximize efforts to contain or delay spread, to possibly avert a pandemic, and to gain time to implement pandemic response measures.</p> <p>Minimize the impact of the pandemic.</p>

⇒ **Recommended strategic actions.**

The document describes strategic actions that can be undertaken to capitalise on each opportunity to intervene which involves a mix of measures that address critical problems with longer-term measures that sustainably improve the world's capacity to protect itself against the recurring pandemic threat.

These recommended strategic actions are phase-wise:

Phase: pre-pandemic

1. Reduce opportunities for human infection
2. Strengthen the early warning system

Phase: emergence of a pandemic virus

3. Contain or delay spread at the source

Phase: pandemic declared and spreading internationally

4. Reduce morbidity, mortality, and social disruption
5. Conduct research to guide response measures

⇒ **The Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN)**

The GOARN is a technical collaboration of existing institutions and networks that pool human and technical resources for the rapid identification, confirmation and response to outbreaks of international importance.

The GOARN contribute towards global health security by:

- Combating the international spread of outbreaks
- Ensuring that appropriate technical assistance reaches affected states rapidly
- Contributing to long-term epidemic preparedness and capacity building.

References

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- *Report of the meeting on the impact of avian influenza on wildlife* by the Chair of SBSTTA

CMS:

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- Convention on Migratory Species (Nairobi, 20-25 November 2005)
- Convention on Migratory Species (Paris, March 27 2006)
- Scientific Seminar on Avian Influenza, the Environment and Migratory Birds (10-11 April 2006)

European Commission:

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- Commission decision C(2006) 1480 (April 7 2006)
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FAO:

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