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**Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological
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**GUIDELINES FOR EXPLAINING NEGATIVE
CHANGES IN EMERALD NETWORK PROPOSED,
CANDIDATE AND ADOPTED SITES**

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INTRODUCTION

Following the progress of Emerald Phase II, many parties of the Bern Convention are repeatedly submitting new versions of databases containing data about candidate and designated Emerald Network sites (Areas of Special Conservation Interest, ASCIs) and even sites which remain, at the status of proposed sites. In most cases, following the insufficiencies indicated in the conclusions derived from the bio-geographical seminars, countries extend their ASCI network by adding new sites and/or enlarging existing sites, and also adding new species and habitat records both to the new and already existing ASCIs.

At the same time, the first cases of negative changes, i.e. site deletions, site area reduction and deletions of species and habitat records have been observed. Such negative changes can occur due to different reasons (previous scientific error, data input error, optimizing borders of ASCIs, border precision upgrade etc.). Yet, the Bern Convention Secretariat needs to be informed about these reasons because previous conclusions of ASCI network sufficiency, especially sufficient conclusions, are based on earlier database versions without negative changes to particular sites, species or habitats.

Therefore in the future all negative changes will be assessed on a systematic basis. In order to facilitate this assessment, Bern Convention parties are asked to cooperate in providing thorough explanations in the form of explanatory notes attached to each new database submission via the ReportNet. The aim of these guidelines is to help countries to prepare such explanatory notes, taking into account the most common situations based on previous experiences of evaluating Emerald databases, and also Natura 2000 databases in the European Union.

Two levels of deletions/modifications in the database can be distinguished: (1) site level and (2) feature level, i.e. affecting species and habitat records.

1. SITE DELETION/MODIFICATION

Site deletions or modifications are usually linked to changes in feature presence/absence or change in abundance, improved species and habitat mapping data, or can be explained by corrections due to improving GIS methods/precision on border delineation. Nevertheless, it is assumed that the latter could explain relatively non-significant changes in the sites' area, thus anything larger than a >5% decrease should be additionally explained.

Any other reasons for site deletion or change in area must be explained in detail.

In the case of site reduction, possible consequences on habitats and species present in sites should be explained, e.g. does the reduction in site area also results in a reduction of habitat areas listed in Resolution N° 4(1996) and/or species populations estimates listed in Resolution N° 6(1998)?

If former existing sites are merged, or former existing sites have been divided into two or more sites (or any other combination that may occur), Contracting Parties must explain the reasons and describe the changes in detail: which site(s) (providing code, name, area) was/were transformed into which site(s) (providing code, name, area)?

It is also important that any changes in site areas and polygons are reflected identically both in the tabular and spatial datasets!

Explanatory notes should be submitted as a separate file in tabular format. As a minimum, Contracting Parties are expected to reflect the negative changes but should also provide information about positive changes such as site additions and area increases. The following minimum table content is suggested, but countries can extend it as required:

Table column name	Explanation
Site code	Please provide at least site code (and the name if possible)
Action	Please indicate if the site was deleted or modified
Explanation	Please explain reason(s) for the negative change.

2. FEATURE DELETION/MODIFICATION

In this chapter the most common reasons for negative changes in Emerald / Natura 2000 databases are described and discussed. Any other reasons should be explained in particular detail.

2.1. DELETION DUE TO NEW INFORMATION

The majority of deletions occur due to new information, often collected by new scientific inventories or due to the preparation of site management plans, especially where initial records in the earlier Standard Data Forms were updated.

In such cases please indicate the date of the last site visit (when absence of a species or a habitat was noted) and the previous visit (when species or habitat was judged present). References in literature should also be indicated if available. For species, please discuss likelihood of site re-colonisation and the state and availability of suitable habitat for a particular species. For habitats, please discuss the possibility of restoration.

2.2. DELETION DUE TO PREVIOUS ERROR

Occasionally technical errors during data input occur. In this case, a clear note is required.

2.3. NAME CORRECTIONS AND RE-CODING OF SITES

If a country has been asked to correct a species name (in principle, species names should be as in Resolution N° 6(1996) of the Bern Convention) and this has been done, the records with the previously used names will appear as deletions. In such cases it is assumed that the number of deleted records is the same as the number of added records with the corrected name.

In some cases, existing sites have been re-coded (site codes changed) therefore all records linked to the old code will appear as deletions and records with the new site code as additions. In such case, the number of deletions should also be the same as the number of added records.

2.4. SITES MERGED

Sometimes countries merge two or more sites, using either one of the existing site codes or a new site code. In such cases habitat and species records of the sites whose codes disappeared will appear as deleted even though the area concerned is still in the ASCI network. In such cases please point out these changes (see also Chapter 1 above regarding changes at site level).

2.5. CORRECTION OF MIS-IDENTIFICATIONS

Occasionally, habitats (rarely species) have been corrected to a different habitat type due to wrong interpretations. For example, if the habitat type 9110 has been changed into habitat type 9130, please explain the rationale and possible changes in total habitat cover.

2.6. FEATURE MODIFICATIONS

Change in the area of a habitat within a site or population estimate of a species within a site may require review of a previous sufficiency assessment at country/bio-geographical level. To help assessing the impact of negative change, please provide full justification together with scientific references in literature if available. If possible, discuss the reasons for the change and link these with the negative threats and pressures listed in field 4.3 of the Standard Data Form “Threats, pressures and activities with impacts on the site”.

Explanatory notes should be in tabular format. As a minimum, it is important to reflect the negative changes, but for completeness countries should also provide information about positive changes – species and habitat additions, especially if it is somehow linked with the deletions (common scientific project/inventory). The following minimum table content is suggested, but countries can extend it as required:

Table column name	Explanation
Site code	Please provide at least the site code (and the name if possible)
Feature code	Please provide species or habitat code
Action	Please indicate if a feature was deleted or modified
Explanation	Please explain reason(s) for the negative change.