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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE  
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Standing Committee**

36<sup>th</sup> meeting  
Strasbourg, 15-18 November 2016

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**REPORT OF THE AD-HOC RESTRICTED GROUP OF EXPERTS ON  
REPORTING ON THE EMERALD NETWORK OF AREAS OF SPECIAL  
CONSERVATION INTEREST**

*Document prepared by  
the Directorate of Democratic Governance*

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The first meeting of the Ad-Hoc Restricted Group of Experts on Reporting on the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest was held in Strasbourg (France), on 19 September 2016.

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- Take note of the report of the meeting of the Ad-Hoc Restricted Group of Experts;
- Take note of the decision of the Ad-Hoc Restricted Group of Experts to establish a deadline for the annual updates of the national Emerald Network databases of Contracting Parties and to set the deadline for the 28<sup>th</sup> of February of each calendar year;
- Take note that the Ad-Hoc Restricted Group of Experts agreed on principle on the reporting format as presented at the meeting;
- Take note of the decision of the Ad-Hoc Restricted Group of Experts that the first reporting exercise should concern a limited number of species and habitats (25 to 50).

## **1. Opening of the meeting : objectives and expected results**

The meeting was opened by the Chair of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks, Mr. Tore Opdhal. He welcomed the 9 Contracting Parties present for this Ad-Hoc Restricted Group of Experts on Reporting on the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest, and all experts and contributors to this meeting in Strasbourg.

Ms. Iva Obretenova, Secretary of the Bern Convention, thanked Tore Opdhal for agreeing to chair the meeting. She explained that the annual meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Network was replaced this year by this Ad-Hoc Restricted Group of Experts on Reporting on the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest.

The Secretariat reminded the double mandate of the Restricted Group, (1) finalising the draft reporting format for the first Emerald Network Reporting exercise covering the period 2013-2018, as foreseen in Resolution No. 8 (2012) and (2) making a selection of the species and habitats on which the Contracting Parties concerned will report on.

The meeting agenda was adopted without changes.

## **2. The implementation of the Emerald Network Calendar 2011-2020 : state of play**

### **a. Overview of the results of all Biogeographical evaluation Seminars since 2011**

The Secretariat provided information on the progress in the establishment of the Emerald network in the past 6 years. Nine Biogeographical Seminars have been organised since 2011, and a tenth one will be held in Georgia at the beginning of December. The Secretariat thanked the European Environmental Agency for the help through the whole process, as well as the European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity (ETC/BD) and the independent experts acting as evaluators in the biogeographical evaluation process.

The delegate from Norway reminded that 2 seminars were dedicated to his country, one in 2013 and one in 2016. A consensus was reached on candidate sites sufficient for 37 species. The Norwegian Environmental Agency will provide its opinion to the Norwegian Government that 568 candidate Emerald sites can already be proposed for official adoption at the 36<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention. These represent a surface of 46000 km<sup>2</sup>, including 300 km<sup>2</sup> of marine areas.

The delegate from Ukraine informed that the national Emerald team is preparing a proposal for the inclusion of 60 new sites in the Emerald Network and that the country will be considering whether they want to see some of their candidate sites adopted already this year.

### **b. Consolidated version of the final Biogeographical evaluations conclusions**

Mr. Marc Roekaerts, consultant to the Council of Europe, presented the results of the Biogeographical Seminars held so far. He worked with the reference lists of species and habitats targeted by the Emerald network and present in each of the 14 countries which have been the subject of a biogeographical evaluation and the evaluation conclusions.

The data from all these countries and evaluations was merged for the first time. Taking into account the total number of species and habitats present in at least one of the countries concerned, in theory there would be 4404 units on which countries will have to report on, with variations from country to country.

The need of a selection for the first round of reporting appeared as necessary.

### **c. Process and timeline for a regular update of the national Emerald Network databases**

The Bern Convention does not have a procedure or a deadline that requires countries to regularly submit updated Emerald network databases. The Secretariat emphasised that such regular updates are essential for following the progress of the setting-up of the network at national level and to report to the

Standing Committee. This would also facilitate the work of the Secretariat in evaluating the needs of countries in terms of technical or scientific support in the Network establishment.

The Secretariat suggested that the Ad-Hoc Restricted Group agrees on an annual deadline for the updates of national Emerald databases and then to recommend the Standing Committee to establish it officially. Taking into account the fact that the Standing Committee meets annually at the end of the year, the Secretariat proposed the 31<sup>st</sup> of January as the deadline for submission of updated databases.

All Contracting Parties present at the meeting welcomed the idea. However, several Parties raised concerns about the important resources required for a yearly update of databases. The Parties also expressed their preference for the deadline to be set to end of February.

In response to some countries comments and questions, the Secretariat reaffirmed the establishment of a deadline does not necessarily means that countries will have to submit new Emerald sites each year. An update could also mean a simple revision of the existing sites database for correcting inconsistencies between tabular and spatial data for example.

The Secretariat further stressed its readiness to continue the Emerald biogeographical evaluation process but only in case the countries show significant progress in completing their Networks at national level, when they submit new updated Emerald databases. Some countries from the Balkans region have expressed an interest in the launching of a second Emerald biogeographical evaluation round, since the first one took place in 2011, 5 years ago.

### **3. Reporting on the Emerald Network: revised reporting format**

#### **a. Proposal by the Secretariat and expert**

Mr. Roekaerts presented the draft reporting format which was part of the working documents package of participants. His work was based on the draft reporting format for Article 17 of the EU Habitat Directive (HD) and Article 12 the EU Bird Directive (BD).

All Parties recognised the importance of such a reporting which would hopefully allow for an analysis of the conservation status of species and habitats at pan-European level.

The Secretariat explained that the results of such a pan-European analysis produced with the information gathered through the reporting will be used in many ways. From the perspective of the Convention, a pan-European overview of conservation status of species and habitats targeted by the Emerald Network will be particularly important for the future strategic development of the Emerald Network, also beyond 2020.

Dominique Richard, manager of the ETC/BD, gave a few other examples of the use made of information gathered through this reporting:

- Preparation of the report State of nature in the EU: <http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/state-of-nature-in-the-eu>
- Species and habitats assessments at EU biogeographical level: example of *Felis silvestris* from the ETC/ND Article 17 portal: <http://bd.eionet.europa.eu/article17/reports2012/species/summary/?period=3&group=Mammals&subject=Felis+silvestris&region=>
- Downloadable synthesis sheets on the species and habitats' conservation status. Such sheets are available for 233 habitats types, 538 bird species and more than 1000 other species: <http://bd.eionet.europa.eu/article17/reports2012/static/factsheets/mammals/felis-silvestris.pdf>

#### **b. Status of the EU reporting format on Art.17 (HD) and Art 12. (BD)**

Dominique Richard informed that EU countries were now preparing the third round of reporting on the conservation status of species and habitats listed in the annexes of the EU Habitats and Birds Directives. The new reporting format is currently being finalised and should be approved this November

(2016). The last available draft format was used by Mr Roekaerts for preparing and adapting it to the needs of the Emerald network (and presented in point 3.a).

Dominique Richard stressed that since November 2015 10 versions of the draft format have been made. Agreeing on the format was a long and complex procedure and it required reaching a consensus amongst many countries.

Mrs. Richard stressed that if the EU is about to end up with this draft format, it is for a reason. There are several main parameters countries are requested to report on: range, population, habitats for the species, main pressures and threats, conservation measures and future prospects. If one of these parameters is not in the format or information is not provided, the assessment of the conservation status would be impossible. The ETC/BD therefore recommended that the Ad-Hoc restricted group does not try to change the format, but that instead it focuses its work on the selection of species and habitats to report on.

### **c. Discussion**

In an open discussion, Parties agreed on the importance of reporting but also reminded their concerns in particular of the financial burden the reporting as such could create. Many countries explained that they might need to start fundraising. Several of them warned that technical assistance from the Secretariat might be needed if it is agreed to go ahead with the format.

The delegate from the United Kingdom shared his experience in the previous reporting exercises for the Birds and Habitats Directives (Art. 17 and 12). He stressed the importance that countries are made aware of the complexity of the process which will not be evident from the start. He agreed that reporting requires a lot of work – in his country between 2 and 4 people working full time for 1 year. He further explained that Guidelines on the format were very useful for facilitating the exercise.

Mr. Roekaerts reminded that 35 years ago Contracting Parties were also very much afraid of adopting the Emerald Standard Data Form but today all candidate and adopted Emerald sites have such SDFs. The new reporting format may look very ambitious now, but countries will not be left alone with this task. He reminded that the first reporting could be limited in order to reduce the burden on countries.

The Chair claimed that the Emerald Network exists, and that there is now a need to check if it works. He encouraged to not abandoning the new reporting format without trying it, based only on fears that it would be too difficult. In addition, he proposed as well that the Ad-Hoc Restricted Group of Experts uses the possibility to limit the first reporting exercise to a small number of species and habitats.

Although expressing fears over the financial and human resources burden such reporting could create, Parties agreed on principle on the reporting format noting the importance of this exercise. This agreement is subject to the limitation of the number of species and habitats to be concerned by the first reporting.

The Secretariat shared its satisfaction that the Ad-Hoc Restricted Group reached consensus on the general idea of the reporting and its format and agreed that the Group should work further during 2017 on the selection of the species and habitats and on the preparation of Guidelines to countries on how to fill in the reporting format. The best timeline for the finalization of the format, the selection of species and the Guidelines is by end 2017. Therefore, on-line consultations and a physical meeting of the Group might be needed for 2017. The Group agreed in this.

### **d. Reporting tool**

The Secretariat reminded that the Bern Convention is using the Online Reporting System (ORS) developed by the World Conservation Monitoring Center (WCMC) for the reporting on derogations made by Contracting Parties. The Secretariat informed about two possible choices:

1. Parties decide to keep using the ORS system for the reporting on the Emerald Network, knowing that this tool may need to be adapted for the specificities of this reporting. This might create an

additional financial burden for the Convention, although it presents the advantage of keeping all reporting under the Bern Convention through one and single tool.

2. Or the Parties decide to request the use of the tool currently developed by the EEA for the reporting on Art. 17 and Art. 12 of the Habitats and Birds Directive. The Secretariat reminded that the current Memorandum of cooperation between the Council of Europe and the EEA, signed 15 years ago, is currently being negotiated.

The delegate from the United Kingdom stated that the WCMC tool is very useful but is more suited for generic text reporting. He therefore advised Parties to use the EEA tool for the Emerald reporting if this reporting is going to follow the reporting of EU member state on conservation status of species and habitats.

The Group agreed that negotiating the use of the new reporting tool of the EEA developed for the EU countries would be the most straightforward and cost effective solution.

#### **4. Species and habitats selection for the 1<sup>st</sup> Emerald Network reporting cycle**

Mr. Roekaerts presented its work on selecting a subset of Species and Habitats for the first reporting exercise (2013-2018). He reminded the criteria already agreed in 2015 and presented his 3 different scenario of the number of species and habitats to report on: Low workload (50), Medium workload (75) and High workload (100). Taking into account the difference of workload between the countries, a fourth scenario was proposed: Very low workload (25 species and habitats to report on).

The countries communicated their preferences between the Very low and Low scenario. They also stressed out the importance of the choices of species.

The consultant proposed to work on a scenario with a number of species and habitats between 25 and 50, concentrating in particular on bird species, with a first list expected in January for comments.

#### **5. General conclusions of the meeting**

The Ad-Hoc Restricted Group of Experts on reporting on the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest agreed to establish a deadline for the annual updates of the national Emerald Network databases of Contracting Parties and to set the deadline for the 28<sup>th</sup> of February of each calendar year.

The Parties approved on principle the reporting format as presented at the meeting and that the first reporting exercise should concern a limited number of species and habitats (25 to 50).

The Group decided to meet again in 2017, possibly back to back with the full Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks meeting. Electronic exchanges between the Group members might also be used as a mean for preparing the physical meeting of the Group.

**Annex 1: Agenda**

***Monday, 19<sup>th</sup> September (09h30 – 17h30)***

***11:00 – 11:20 Coffee break***

***12:30 – 14:00 Lunch break***

***15:30 – 15:50 Coffee break***

**1. Opening of the meeting: objectives and expected results**

Report of the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the GoEPAEN in 2015 [T-PVS/PA(2015)13]  
Extract from the list of decisions and adopted texts on the protection of habitats, at the 35<sup>th</sup> meeting of the  
Standing Committee [T-PVS/PA(2016)5E]

**2. Adoption of the agenda**

Meeting agenda [T-PVS/PA(2016)3]

**3. The implementation of the Emerald Network Calendar 2011-2020: state of play**

Revised Emerald Network Calendar (2011-2020) [T-PVS/PA(2015)16]

- a. Overview of the results of all biogeographical evaluation Seminars since 2011**
- b. Consolidated version of the final Biogeographical evaluations conclusions**
- c. Process and timeline for a regular update of the national Emerald Network databases**

Process and timeline for a regular update of the national Emerald databases [T-PVS/PA(2016)7]

**4. Reporting on the Emerald Network: revised reporting format**

- a. Proposal by the Secretariat and expert**

Reporting formats for the period 2013-2018 [T-PVS/PA(2016)6]

- b. Status of the EU reporting format on Art. 17 (HD) and Art. 12 (BD)**
- c. Discussion**
- d. Reporting tool**

**5. Species and habitats selection for the 1<sup>st</sup> Emerald Network reporting cycle**

- a. Proposal by the Secretariat and discussion**

Proposal for the selection of species and habitats [T-PVS/PA(2016)8]

**6. Possible timetable for work ahead of a submission of the reporting format to the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention****7. Conclusions of the meeting**

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