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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

35th meeting
Strasbourg, 1-4 December 2015

**REPORT OF THE 7TH MEETING OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS
ON PROTECTED AREAS AND ECOLOGICAL NETWORKS**

*Document prepared by
the Directorate of Democratic Governance*

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The 7th meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks was held in Strasbourg (France), on 16 and 17 September 2015.

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- Take note of the report of the meeting of the Group of Experts, as well as of the mid-term review of progress in the implementation of the Emerald Network Calendar 2011-2020;
- Take note of the decision of the Group of Experts to form a Restricted Ad-hoc Group on Reporting, charged with the drafting of the form to be used by Parties for reporting on the Emerald Network implementation, as required by Resolution No. 8 (2012), and to convene this Group;
- Thank the European Environment Agency and its European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity for the crucial technical and scientific support provided throughout 2015;
- Consider the proposals for the future activities on the setting-up of the Emerald Network and the Pan-European Ecological Network, when adopting its Programme of activities and budget for 2016-2017;
- Examine and, if appropriate, adopt the following documents:
 - Draft updated list of officially nominated candidate Emerald sites;
 - Draft updated list of officially adopted Emerald sites;
 - Draft Revised Calendar for the implementation of the Emerald Network (2011-2020);
 - Draft Recommendation on improving the conservation of nature outside protected areas proper.

1. Opening of the meeting, adoption of the agenda and information introduction to the mandate of the Group and meeting agenda

The meeting was opened by the Chair of the Group of Experts, Mr. Jacques Stein, who welcomed the 22 Contracting Parties and all experts and contributors to the meeting in Strasbourg. He reminded that 2015 is an important year as it marks the mid-term of the implementation by countries of the Emerald Network Calendar 2011-2020. The meeting agenda was adopted without changes.

The Secretariat reminded the double mandate of the Group, (1) dealing with technical and scientific issues linked to the constitution of the Emerald Network and (2) facilitating the exchange of experiences, practices and initiatives related to the establishment of the Pan-European Ecological Network.

The Secretariat further provided information on the [work achieved in other Groups of Experts of the Bern Convention in 2015](#), in particular on the issue of biodiversity and Climate Change and Illegal Killing of Birds, of particular importance for the work of this Expert's Group.

2. Mid-term review of progress in the implementation of the Emerald Network Calendar 2011-2020

Contracting Parties to the Convention briefly presented progress in the implementation of the Emerald Calendar 2011-2020. Some countries have provided written reports which are made available in a compilation [document [T-PVS/PA \(2015\)5](#)].

The Secretariat further presented its own draft mid-term review report on progress in the implementation of the Emerald Network Calendar adopted in 2010 [document [T-PVS/PA \(2015\)6](#)]. The analysis report shows that mid-term though the Emerald Calendar implementation progress in the setting-up of the Emerald Network is clear, although achievements vary greatly between Parties and geographical regions covered. The Emerald Network covers nearly 600 000 km², around 3000 adopted and candidate Emerald sites and an average of 11-12% of the participating countries' territories. Among the issues in need of further efforts at national level in order to achieve the targets set for countries in the Calendar are resource mobilisation efforts, greater stakeholders' involvement, strengthen political attention, more inter-ministerial cooperation and field research.

Parties were invited to make their comments/propose additions to the mid-term review document by 16 October, after which the document will be considered final and prepared to be presented for information to the Standing Committee in December 2015.

3. Tools for the Emerald Network implementation

3.1 Emerald Network Software

Mr. Marc Roekaerts, consultant to the Council of Europe presented the newly released second version of the Emerald Network Software and in particular some of the features which were updated and added to the tool in order to improve its accessibility and manageability. Parties were requested to send their comments on this new version by 16 October 2015.

3.2 Emerald Habitats Interpretation Manual

The Secretariat reminded that in December 2014, the Standing Committee to the Convention adopted a revised Resolution No. 4 (1996) listing the habitats in need of site conservation. This new version of Resolution No. 4 (1996) includes several new habitats resulting from the harmonisation of the lists of habitats to be protected under the Emerald and Natura 2000 Networks, as well as three new proposals for additional habitats by Ukraine and Switzerland. As a result, a revision of the **Emerald Habitats Interpretation Manual** was necessary, so the tool includes all newly added habitats from Resolution No. 4 (1996). The new additions to the Habitats Interpretation Manual [3rd draft version, document [T-PVS/PA \(2015\)9](#)] were presented and Parties were given some additional time to comment on the habitats' descriptions, by 16 October 2015.

The Secretariat further informed the Group that it concluded a contract with the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, for the preparation of the French versions of the revised

Resolution No. 4 (1996) and the third version of the Habitats Interpretation Manual. These two tools should be ready before the end of 2015.

3.3 Taxonomic check of the proposals for additional species to Resolution No. 6 (1998)

The European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity (ETC/BD) presented the work achieved throughout the year on the issue of **the taxonomy of a nearly 600 possible new proposals for addition to Resolution No. 6 (1998)**. This work is led by experts from Catalogue of Life and should be finalised by the end of 2015-beginning of 2016. The ETC/BD informed that as soon as the taxonomical check is completed, the nearly 600 species will be added to the Emerald Network Software in the section “Other” species or habitats present on the site. Therefore, Parties working on the Emerald Network setting-up will be able to include in any Emerald site Standard Data Form, which species from this list are present on the site, even though these species are not recorded in Resolution No. 6 (1998) of the Bern Convention.

3.4 Reporting on the Emerald Network

For a third consecutive year, the issue of the future national **reporting on the Emerald Network as requested by Resolution No. 8 (2012)** was debated by the Group of Experts. The Secretariat and consultant presented a new draft model form [document [T-PVS/PA \(2015\)11](#)] which is adapted from the Natura 2000 reporting format. The Secretariat’s intention was to clearly present to Parties what would a reporting on a subset of species and habitats would entail for them, taking as an example how reporting is organised for EU countries.

Several Parties expressed their fears that the reporting format as such is very complex and would entail a lot of work at national level for Parties, although the Group still considers that the reporting should be organised in a way that facilitates comparison of data at pan-European level. After a long discussion, the Group of Experts agreed that the matter of reporting is a complex one and that most delegates present are not necessarily the persons which are responsible for databases, monitoring and reporting in the competent authorities.

The Group of Experts agreed to form a Restricted Ad-hoc Group on Reporting, charged with the drafting of the form to be used by Parties for reporting on the Emerald Network implementation as required by Resolution No. 8 (2012). The Standing Committee to the Convention will be informed of this decision and asked to convene this Group which would possibly meet for the first time in 2016 and link the issue of the Emerald network reporting to the general reporting under the Bern Convention using the Online Reporting System.

The delegate from Ukraine proposed that the first reporting exercise requested by Resolution No. 8 (2012) is included in the Emerald Calendar (2011-2020), which was adopted before the adoption of the Resolution. With the agreement of the Group of Experts, the Secretariat was charged to prepare a revised draft version of the Emerald Calendar (2011-2020), to include a deadline for the preparation of the Emerald network progress report based on the Parties reports, as foreseen in Resolution No. 8 (2012). The Standing Committee will be invited to adopt the draft revised version of the Calendar [document T-PVS/PA (2015)16].

4. Emerald Network management: exchange of experiences and guidance

Mrs Ramona Topić from the State Institute for Nature Protection in Croatia explained how the implementation of the Emerald Network supported the work of the country towards the setting-up of the Natura 2000 Network, after their EU accession. She clarified what legislative changes were put in place in order to implement the EU Nature Protection Directives and how work is practically organised for the management of the Natura 2000 areas between the different stakeholders and actors. Her complete presentation can be consulted [here](#).

Mr. Werner Kammel, expert in the conservation of invertebrate species presented an example of the practical implementation of the Natura 2000 in Austria, at a locality of Eastern Austria. He presented in details the process of the establishment of a management plan for the “Lafnitztal – Neudauer Teiche“ Natura 2000 site, the challenges encountered regarding the conservation of the

species and habitats on the site and the solutions found. His complete presentation can be consulted [here](#).

Mr. Toby Aykroyd from the Wild Europe Initiative informed the Group on what his organisation's main objectives and achievements are, also in relation to policy lobbying at European level. He clarified what his organisation considers as wild areas and what is their approach to the management of these areas, in particular non-intervention management practices. He stressed the successes of his organisation in some parts of Europe and gave some hints on possible areas of cooperation and contribution of Wild Europe Initiative to the setting-up of the Emerald Network. His presentation can be found [here](#).

Mrs. Carole Ritchie, the Executive Director of the EUROPARC Federation provided an update on the current EUROPARC network initiatives. She suggested several areas of possible future cooperation between the Federation and the Convention, aiming at facilitating the Emerald Network future management practices by making full use of EUROPARC member's expertise. EUROPARC members are managing Natura 2000 areas in many countries and their experiences can be particularly valuable. Her full presentation can be found [here](#).

Mrs. Aysegül Cil from the European Centre for Nature Conservation (ECNC) presented the new Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process which ECNC is implementing on behalf of the European Commission. She stressed the process is aiming at improved stakeholder engagement, at identifying key management issues in relation to Natura 2000 sites and at delivering solutions. She stressed the process is at the heart of the EU Biodiversity strategy and its 6 targets and further explained what was achieved so far through the process and what remains to be done. Her full presentation can be downloaded [here](#).

5. Draft Guidelines on planning management measures for Emerald sites, including climate change adaptation and mitigation – 3rd draft version and Draft Recommendation

The Secretariat presented the third draft version of the Guidelines on planning management measures for the Emerald sites [document [T-PVS/PA \(2015\)10](#)]. The Secretariat reminded the background of the paper and informed the Group that this version is the result of a third revision and simplification of the original paper. A decision on whether this document will be finalized and how had to be taken by the Group, bearing in mind that its use is completely voluntary for Parties.

The Secretariat reminded again that these guidelines are one of several tools which are developed for facilitating the work at national level on the Network establishment and should be used in combination with the [European Guidelines on protected areas and Invasive Alien Species](#) and the [Guidance paper "Towards management of Emerald sites"](#).

After a discussion, the Group agreed that Parties should be given some additional time to comment on this third version before the paper is considered as final. Comments by Parties are expected by 16 October 2015.

6. Pan-European Ecological Network

Mrs. Dalia Bastyte from Lithuania presented a pilot ecological network for improving the connectivity between reptile and amphibian populations. She explained how the efficiency of the Natura 2000 Network can be limited for certain species and how her organisation, the Lithuanian Fund for Nature, planned the establishment of a real ecological network in the country which could complete the connectivity for these species. She further presented in details the LIFE + projects implemented in the country for restoring the habitats and their connectivity for species listed in the Bern Convention and EU Nature Directives lists. Her full presentation can be downloaded [here](#).

Mr. Didier Labat, coordinator of the La trame Verte et Bleue, the French national programme aimed at improving the ecological connectivity in France, presented the origins of the programme, its current state of play and the remaining challenges regarding its full implementation. His full presentation can be downloaded [here](#).

7. Implementation by Contracting Parties of Recommendation No. 25 (1991) on the conservation of natural areas outside protected areas proper

The Secretariat reminded that the follow-up of Recommendation No. 25 (1991) was initiated by the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks (GoEPAEN) back in 2013. In 2015, thanks to the more active reporting by Parties, an analysis report of the measures implemented to comply with Recommendation No. 25 (1991) was prepared by a consultant, Mr. Rob Jongman. The Secretariat insisted that the follow-up to be given to this analysis report is to be discussed by the Group of Experts.

Mr. Jongman presented his report, the methodology followed and the findings, including the final section with recommendations to Parties for improving their action on nature conservation outside protected areas proper. His presentation can be downloaded [here](#) and his analysis report is available in document T-PVS/PA (2015)8.

Parties thanked the consultant for his work and considered that the report is important and should be presented at the upcoming Standing Committee meeting of the Convention. They expressed a willingness that the expert reviews the report by improving its readability and inserting some tables which easily show progress and the most important measures Parties have put in place.

The experts from the Czech Republic and France stressed that it is important to use the Standing Committee of the Convention to stress the need for strengthened action by Parties on issues such as ecological connectivity, defragmentation and cross-sectoral cooperation for the benefit of nature conservation outside protected areas proper.

The Group charged the Secretariat to prepare a new draft Recommendation which will be forwarded to the Standing Committee for adoption. The draft Recommendation should not create new obligations for Parties. It should motivate them to work towards more ecological connectivity and cross-sectoral cooperation in favor of nature conservation, building on the momentum created by initiatives at European level such as the EU Green Infrastructure Initiative.

The Secretariat will prepare the draft Recommendation by 25 September and Parties' comments and possible additions and changes will be expected by 16 October 2015.

8. Election of the new Chair of the Group of Experts

The Secretariat thanked the outgoing Chair of the Group of Experts, Mr. Jacques Stein, for his dedication and hard work during the past years and wished him all the best for the retirement period he is debuting. Mr. Tore Opdahl, who was the only expert applying for the position of Chair of the Group of Experts, was unanimously elected as new Chair.

9. Conclusions of the meeting and future work of the Group of Experts

The Group agreed to set 21-22 September as tentative dates for its 8th meeting due in 2016. The Secretariat presented the idea that the Group meets outside Strasbourg for the first time since its establishment in 2009. This could also be an opportunity for the organisation of a back-to-back field visit to a Natura 2000/Emerald site, where participants can learn firsthand what the management challenges practitioners meet in their daily work.

The Secretariat called on Parties who are willing to host the event to make them known.

The Group agreed to pursue its activities in 2016 in line with its meeting conclusions and programme of work available [here](#).

Annex 1: Agenda

Wednesday, 16th 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**
- 2. Adoption of the agenda**
- 3. Mandate of the Group and decisions of the 34th meeting of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention on the protection of natural habitats – Secretariat of the Bern Convention**

Report of the 6th meeting of the GoEPAEN [T-PVS/PA(2014)14]
Extract from the list of decisions and adopted texts on the protection of habitats [T-PVS/PA(2015)7]

 - 3.1 Information on relevant work under other Groups of Experts of the Bern Convention in 2015 – Secretariat of the Bern Convention

Programme of work on Climatic Change and Biodiversity Conservation [T-PVS/Inf(2015)25]
- 4. The implementation of the Emerald Network Calendar 2011-2020 – Reports by Contracting Parties**

Calendar for the implementation of the Emerald Network (2011-2020) - T-PVS/PA(2010)08revE
Implementation of the Emerald Network Calendar (2011-2020) – National reports [T-PVS/PA(2015)5]
- 5. Overall mid-term review of progress in the implementation of the Emerald Network Calendar 2011-2020 – Report by the Secretariat of the Bern Convention**

Mid-term review of progress on the Emerald Network Calendar [T-PVS/PA(2015)6]
- 6. Tools for the Emerald Network implementation**
 - 6.1 Status of the new release of the Emerald Software (look-up tables for other species list, designation types, etc.)
 - 6.2 Revised Resolution No. 4 (1996) and new release of the Habitats Interpretation Manual

Revised Resolution No. 4 (1996)
Habitats Interpretation Manual, third revised version [T-PVS/PA(2015)9]
 - 6.3 Status of work on the taxonomy of possible new proposals for addition to Resolution No. 6 (1998) by the Catalogue of Life
 - 6.4 Reporting on the Emerald Network: revised reporting format (including discussion on delivery of distribution maps on species and habitats for all Emerald countries)

Second draft reporting format on Rec. No.16 (1989) and Res. No.5 (1998) [T-PVS/PA(2015)11]
- 7. Emerald Network management: exchange of experiences and guidance**
 - 7.1 Implementing the Emerald and Natura 2000 Networks in Croatia - Mrs. Ramona Topić, State Institute for Nature Protection, Croatia
 - 7.2 Implementing the Natura 2000 Network in Germany (tbc)
 - 7.3 Natura 2000 in Austria: example of examination and implementation of the FFH Directive at a locality of Eastern Austria – Mr. Werner Kammel
 - 7.4 Managing wild areas, restoration and non-intervention management - Mr. Toby Aykroyd, Wild Europe Initiative
 - 7.5 Update on current EUROPARC network initiatives – Mrs. Carole Ritchie, Executive Director, EUROPARC Federation

7.6 The new Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process for enhancing effective management, monitoring and reporting of the Natura 2000 network – Mrs. Aysegul Cil, ECNC

A dinner booking can be made at a restaurant (8pm) to help those wishing to get together in the evening. More information will be given during the meeting. Please note that this is not an invitation from the Council of Europe.

Thursday, 17th September (09h30 – 12h30)
10:40 – 11:00 Coffee break

7.7 Draft Guidelines on planning management measures for Emerald sites, including climate change adaptation and mitigation – 3rd draft version and Draft Recommendation

Third draft Guidelines on planning management measures for Emerald sites [T-PVS/PA(2015)10]

8. Pan-European Ecological Network

8.1 Presentations on projects/initiatives on the establishment of ecological networks:

- A pilot ecological network in South Lithuania for improving the improve connectivity between reptile and amphibian populations – Mrs. Dalia Bastyte
- Ecological connectivity in France: La trame Verte et Bleue – Mr. Didier Labat

8.2 Implementation by Contracting Parties of Recommendation No. 25 (1991) on the conservation of natural areas outside protected areas proper – analysis of reports submitted by Contracting Parties, Mr. Rob Jongman

Analysis report on the follow up of Rec. No. 25 (1991) [T-PVS/PA(2015)8]

8.3 Discussion on the follow-up to be given to the analysis report

9. Future work of the Group of Experts

9.1 Programme of activities 2016

9.2 Next meeting of the Group of Experts

10. Any other business

11. Election of the new Chair of the Group of Experts

12. Conclusions of the meeting

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