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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Group of Experts on
Protected Areas and Ecological Networks**

5th meeting
18-19 September 2013
Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France

**Report of the 1st Emerald biogeographical
Seminar for Norway**

*Document prepared
by the Directorate of Democratic Governance*

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Opening and welcoming words

On behalf of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention, its Chair *Jan Plesnik* warmly thanked to the hosts from the Directorate for Nature Management for organising the meeting. He explained that the seminar is of key importance for the whole Emerald process, as Norway is one of the leading countries working on the Network setting-up. The results of the biogeographic assessment should be seen as an opportunity to identify further action to be implemented by the Norwegian authorities to complete the Network on their territory. He acknowledged and expressed his gratitude for the continuous partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Environment Agency and its European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity in support of the Emerald process.

Berit Lein, Head of Department at the Directorate for Nature Management welcomed the participants to the event and stressed the importance of the event for Norway which marks the beginning of the implementation of the Emerald Network Phase II in Norway. She underlined that their expectations towards the meeting lies in receiving guidance on where the national authorities should concentrate their efforts for additional site identification. The country delivered a database with 633 potential sites, subject to evaluation at the present Seminar. She concluded by informing that a major merge is foreseen to take place as from the 1st of July 2013, between the Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management and the Norwegian Climate and Pollution Agency. The new entity will be called the Norwegian Environment Agency. The Nature Directorate considers the merge represents an opportunity for nature conservation in the country, enabling greater coherence of action between the different fields of competence of the future Agency.

Dominique Richard, Manager of the ETC/BD presented the work of the ETC/BD in support of the Emerald Network, work done in the frame of the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Council of Europe and the European Environment Agency. She stressed the importance of the seminar for reaching consistencies in terms of ecological networks across Europe and reminded the latest figures of the achievements by the Natura 2000 Network at EU level. The methodology used for the assessment of the Emerald sites is largely inspired by the methodology the ETC/BD has contributed to build for Natura 2000. The biogeographical process therefore assesses the contribution of the sites proposed to ensure the conservation of the Bern Convention species and habitats. D. Richard addressed some difficulties encountered by the ETC/BD in carrying out the background assessments and thanked the country authorities for their efforts to remedy to some problems of the database on time for the Seminar.

Iva Obretenova, Emerald project manager at the Council of Europe presented a brief overview of progress achieved in the setting-up of the Emerald Network in other countries and reminded of the recent and on-going processes aimed at ensuring an increased harmonisation between the Emerald and the Natura 2000 Networks, for ensuring greater coherence of both networks at Pan-European level:

- translation (2010) of Annex 1 to Resolution No. 4 (1996) on natural habitats requiring specific conservation measures into the EUNIS habitats classification;
- revision (2011) of the list of species under Annex 1 to Resolution No. 6 (1998), harmonised with the list of species of Annex I of the Birds Directive and Annex II of the Habitat Directive;
- comparison exercise between the lists of habitats targeted by Resolution No. 4 (1996) of the Bern Convention and the Annex I of the Habitats Directive going on since 2012;

- Resolution No. 8 (2012) of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention on the national designation of Emerald sites and their management and reporting.

Otars Opermanis, Senior Officer at the ETC/BD, presented the aim of the draft conclusions sent to the national authorities, which will support the discussions during the three day Seminar. The draft conclusions are based on the ETC/BD expert's findings which should be discussed with the country experts and checked against their knowledge.

He reminded that the question of the sufficiency is the most important one to be debated during the event – how much sites is enough? *O. Opermanis* stressed that no numerical limits are possible, as the countries evaluated are different. The evaluation looks at the distribution range, the ecological variation and the distribution patterns of a given species, as well as where is the significant proportion of the national resource for preparing the draft conclusions. He reminded that the evaluation is done on a species by species and habitat by habitat basis. He further commented on the sites proposed in Norway and the fact that the biogeographic regions in the country are very detailed and that many sites belong to two regions. He explained that many questions will be raised, such as is there a need to have small sites in the Arctic and boreal regions? During the Seminar the D category approach will also be debated and a discussion should be held on the population level. If the population of a given species/habitat is really not significant, then it should be removed from the country reference list.

Douglas Evans, Senior Officer at the ETC/BD explained some problems encountered with habitats evaluation. The change of the habitats classification of Resolution No. 4 to the EUNIS classification resulted in a lot of work for the national authorities. In the Norwegian database, 13 'old' habitats were not converted from the Palearctic to the EUNIS classification. *D. Evans* proposed that these habitats are discussed at the present Seminar if necessary and if time allows.

Tore Opdahl, from the Directorate for Nature management agreed with the summing-up and the challenges of their database and explained how the Directorate has worked with the materials provided and the fact that they did not have a lot of time to thoroughly discuss all the draft conclusions with all relevant experts at national level. He further explained that several technical issues on habitat classification and constraints of resources prevented them to work sufficiently with the habitats. He also informed about progress regarding the new national habitat classification and on current work regarding marine habitats.

He explained that one of the key issues for the country is the possibility to request exceptions for some species marked with the sign # in the Resolution No. 6. The country requests to have an explanation on the procedure to be followed regarding this particular issue. He further mentioned some of the reasons behind the country willingness to request exceptions: abundant species; D category species (edge of distribution range); or existence of other management measures ensuring the protection of the species other than site protection.

In a response to the questions on the requests for exceptions, *Iva Obretenova* underlined that no clear answer could be made available for this meeting and stressed that the issue of requesting exceptions is being raised for the first time by the Norwegian authorities since the initiation of the Emerald process, including other biogeographical seminars. In this relation, the Bern Convention Secretariat will bring the issue up to the relevant Group of Experts meeting in the frame of the Bern Convention (meeting in September 2013) and propose a draft procedure to be followed in case a country would like to request an exception linked to the # sign in Resolution No. 6 (1998).

Discussion on the sufficiency of species and habitats in the proposed Emerald sites

The discussion on sufficiency of representation of species and habitats in the proposed Emerald sites was carried out species by species and habitat by habitat for each of the biogeographic regions present in the country (Arctic, Boreal, Alpine and Atlantic).

The conclusions of the assessments were compiled by *Marc Roekaerts*, consultant to the Council of Europe. They will be sent to the national authorities and NGOs for a final check and agreement by the end of July 2013. Possible comments and changes are expected before the end of August 2013. The conclusions will then be considered as final and will be made available on the webpage of the meeting.

Conclusions of the seminar: next steps

Iva Obretenova, Bern Convention Secretariat, appreciated the efforts and hard work of both the Norwegian colleagues and the ETC/BD experts, before and during the Seminar, in particular in a context where the Emerald Network rules and methodologies are changing, i.e. lists of species and habitats, criteria for evaluation, habitats classifications, new resolutions on designation and monitoring, etc.

She reminded that the issue of the # sign on some species in Resolution No. 6 (1998) is a new issue and has to be dealt with carefully. The Secretariat of the Convention will raise the attention of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks, meeting in the frame of the Convention and will propose some rules and processes to be followed for the evaluation of any exemption demand.

Regarding the immediate follow-up to the meeting, the draft conclusions after the Seminar discussions will be ready by the end of July 2013 and will then be circulated for comments to the national authorities and NGOs. A deadline for the reception of eventual requests for changes was set to end of August 2013.

I. Obretenova reminded that the Norwegian authorities are expected to decide whether they want to submit all the 633 sites for official nomination as candidate Emerald sites or to directly propose all of them for official adoption as Emerald sites, already to the next 33rd Standing Committee. A decision to propose only part of the sites discussed here for official adoption and the rest for nomination as candidates only is equally acceptable.

The organisation of a next biogeographical Seminar for Norway will depend on the progress achieved by the Norwegian authorities with the conclusions from the current Seminar, bearing in mind the Emerald Calendar 2020 and the milestones set for Norway. She hoped the Seminar will enhance the interest towards the Network setting-up in the country and will facilitate the further work of the Norwegian authorities towards the completing the Network on its territory.

In that sense, the organisation of awareness raising activities has to accompany the scientific and political processes behind the Network setting-up. These activities have to focus in particular on the relevant stakeholders, but equally on general public. They should be explaining the objective of the Emerald Network, including chasing away a lot of the preconceived ideas in larger public opinion regarding the implementation of ecological networks.

Tore Opdahl also thanked all the participants to the Seminar and all the experts involved in the Emerald Network setting-up. He underlined that all the experts, within the new Agency and outside consultants, should now do a follow-up to the work based on the conclusions. However, he reminded that Norway is still heading to reach its timelines from the Emerald Calendar for the finalization of the Network - end of 2014.

In conclusion, Mr *Jan Plesnik*, Chair of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention, also expressed his thanks, on behalf of the Standing Committee to the Convention, to all actors involved for the successful meeting and reminded again on the need to better communicate on achievements made under this Emerald process.

Appendix I: Participants' list

EMERALD BIOGEOGRAPHIC SEMINAR

IN NORWAY

18 – 20 June 2003

Trondheim, Norway

Participants' list

Name	Organisation/country	Position	E-mail
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