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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE  
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**GROUP OF EXPERTS ON PROTECTED AREAS AND ECOLOGICAL NETWORKS**

Strasbourg (16 - 17 September 2015)

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**EMERALD NETWORK SUFFICIENCY EVALUATION  
(PHASE II): METHODOLOGY, PRACTICAL ORGANISATION AND  
OUTCOMES**

*Document prepared by  
the Directorate of Democratic Governance*

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## 1. EMERALD NETWORK CONSTITUTION PROCESS

The constitution process of the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest (ASCIs) consists of three different stages or “Phases” of implementation:

- **Phase I:** Participating countries assess their natural resources and identify species and habitats to be protected according to the relevant resolutions of the Bern Convention. They subsequently select potential sites which are suitable for ensuring the long-term survival of the “Emerald” species and habitats, and they send a database containing scientific information on the proposed sites to the Bern Convention’s Secretariat. The sites proposed for joining the Network can be submitted for official nomination as candidate Emerald sites to the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention. Recommendation No. 157 (2011) of the Standing on the status of candidate Emerald sites therefore applies.
- **Phase II:** An evaluation of the efficiency of the proposed sites is done on a species by species and habitat by habitat base, at a biogeographical level. Once the scientific value of the proposed/candidate sites is assessed, the result will be submitted to the Standing Committee and the valid sites will eventually be approved so to formally integrate the Emerald Network.
- **Phase III:** This last phase consist of the national designation of the adopted ASCI’s and the planning and implementation of management, reporting and monitoring measures, under the responsibility of national authorities.

Sites proposed as Emerald sites by individual countries are eligible to become ASCIs only if they contribute to the conservation of habitat types listed in Resolution No. 4 (1996) and species listed in Resolution No. 6 (1998) of the Bern Convention and endorsed by the Standing Committee of the Convention.

## 2. OVERALL DESCRIPTION OF THE SUFFICIENCY EVALUATION OF PROPOSED/CANDIDATE ASCIS FOR THE “EMERALD” SPECIES AND HABITATS

The evaluation of Emerald sites databases is a cycle consisting of the following steps:

- (1) Submission of proposals in the form of a database by the National Authorities to the Bern Convention Secretariat, using the Common Data Repository(CDR)/Reportnet of the European Environment Agency (EEA);
- (2) Quality check of the database by the Bern Convention Secretariat, followed by correction of incompleteness and errors by parties;
- (3) Nomination as official candidate sites by the Bern Convention Standing Committee;
- (4) Preliminary evaluation of the sufficiency of the proposed list of ASCIs (feature/ country/ biogeographical region) and preparation of draft conclusions for each feature for each biogeographical region, where applicable;
- (5) Scientific discussion at an Emerald (regional) biogeographical seminar and assessment of the sufficiency, resulting in Final conclusions and an agreed reference list for each targeted country;
- (6) If necessary, proposal of additional Emerald Sites and update of the database by national authorities;’
- (7) Submission of revised database, through the CDR of the EEA;
- (8) Submission of the final conclusions from the Seminars and the national site list to the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological networks for discussion;
- (9) Submission to the Bern Convention Standing Committee for adoption.

The evaluation of the Emerald network is thus an iterative process. Conclusions on the sufficiency of national ASCI proposals will result in the need for new proposed Emerald sites or

extension of existing sites if the conclusions are found unsatisfactory. An increase in site numbers with time is expected due to improving scientific knowledge and changes in nature. In all cases, re-submitted ASCIs proposals will be re-evaluated providing updated conclusions.

### 3. ORGANISATION OF THE EVALUATION BIOGEOGRAPHICAL SEMINARS

#### 3.1 Aim of the evaluation seminars

The seminars aim to (1) agree on the Reference Lists for each targeted country -showing the Species and habitats for which a country holds a responsibility in designating ASCIs-, (2) discuss national site proposals species by species, habitat by habitat, according to the agreed Reference Lists and (3) conclude on sufficiency of site proposals for each feature.

The preliminary evaluation of the Emerald country databases (step 4 above) should result in **draft Detailed Conclusions**. These documents will form the basis of discussions at the biogeographical seminar. In order to facilitate the discussion during the Seminar, they will be **distributed at the latest two weeks ahead of the meeting** to all actors involved in the process.

#### 3.2 Actors of the evaluation seminars

The Seminars are attended by the following actors:

- Country delegation
- Council of Europe
- Evaluators
- NGOs (nature conservation & land owners, if possible)
- Independent experts
- Observers

#### 3.3 Order of discussions

In order to facilitate the smooth and swift discussions during the Seminars, a strict order is set and respected under the supervision and authority of the Chair of the meeting. The Chair of the meeting is a representative of the Bern Convention Standing Committee or Bureau. He/she ensures the following order of speaking time is respected:

1. Experts/evaluators: main facts and proposed conclusion (if situation is clear)
2. Government (country delegation)
3. NGOs
4. Independent experts (if appropriate)
5. Chair: announcing the conclusion

The **seminar is organised as a discussion forum among the actors described above**, where each species and habitat will be assessed per party and biogeographical region, according to the agreed Reference List.

The **Chair** announces the final decision on each conclusion.

The Chair can call upon an **independent expert** who will be invited to attend and provide his/her opinion in cases where consensus cannot be reached.

A **country delegation** can be composed of one delegate representing a competent national Ministry, which is accompanied by a number of scientific advisors. However, in order to ensure the Seminar discussions are held as smoothly as possible, only one person is allowed to speak on behalf of the national authorities for a given feature. The person taking the floor should be decided prior to the meeting and internally by each concerned Contracting Party. The person speaking on behalf of the national delegation can change in the course of the Seminar, for example when the taxa being discussed changes.

An **NGO delegation** can equally be composed of a number of participants, however, only one person is allowed to speak during the evaluation discussions, again aiming at ensuring smooth and quick decisions for each feature.

#### 4. CRITERIA FOR THE EVALUATION OF PROPOSED/CANDIDATE SITE'S SUFFICIENCY

A dedicated section of the document called [Revised Criteria for the evaluation of the sufficiency of proposed ASCIs](#), adopted by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention in December 2013, describes in details the criteria used for the evaluation of the sites sufficiency. Please refer to this document for more information.

#### 5. OUTCOMES OF THE EVALUATION SEMINARS

The discussions will result in an agreed conclusion on sufficiency/ insufficiency of site proposals for each individual species and habitats present in the countries. They will be presented in a document called **Final detailed conclusions** of the seminar, together with the **a Reference Lists for each country**, to be published on the Council of Europe's website and results communicated to the Bern Convention instances.

The **Final Detailed Conclusions** will guide parties on what actions they should undertake in order to improve the Emerald network at national and biogeographical level. **Table 2** below shows the type and categories of conclusions that will be used during the seminar and actions that will be required from the parties after the seminar.

**Table 2:** Conclusions and their abbreviations used during the biogeographical evaluation, done on a species by species, habitat by habitat basis. Codes can be combined, for example 'IN MOD and CD' would indicate that additional sites are required and that the existing proposals need correcting or completing.

Code	Meaning	Action required
SUF	Sufficient	No further sites needed
IN MAJOR	Insufficient major	No sites proposed at present. A major effort to designate sites is needed
IN MOD	Insufficient moderate	One or a number of additional sites (or maybe extension to sites) required. IN MOD GEO means that additional site(s) are required in certain region to eliminate geographical gap
IN MIN	Insufficient minor	No additional sites required but habitat/species should be noted on sites already proposed for other habitats/species
CD	Correction of data	Data needs to be corrected / completed / deleted
Sci Res	Scientific reserve	A definite conclusion is not possible: need to investigate/clarify a scientific issue – interpretation of habitat, controversial presence of species, etc.

#### 6. APPROVAL AND ADOPTION OF SITES AT THE BIOGEOGRAPHICAL LEVEL

The results of each biogeographical Seminar, as listed above in point 5, are presented to the Bern Convention instances in charge of the follow-up of progress in the Network establishment, as they hold an explicit mandate.

The Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks (GoEPAEN) receives the database of official candidate sites for discussion and the Final detailed conclusions resulting from the evaluation Seminars. The GoEPAEN will then forward the final list to the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention for adoption.