Strasbourg, 8 February 2025 **T-PVS/inf(2025)05**

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

WORKING GROUP
ON OVERSEEING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE BERN CONVENTION FOR THE PERIOD TO 2030

Draft questionnaire for the 2025 voluntary national updates on the implementation of the Strategic Plan

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Draft questionnaire for the 2025 voluntary national updates on the implementation of the Strategic Plan

Introduction

In accordance with paragraph 2 of the Standing Committee's Recommendation No. 220 (2023), the Working Group on overseeing implementation of the Strategic Plan agreed a simple template, in the form of a four-part questionnaire, for Parties to use on a voluntary basis for providing annual national updates on implementation of the Plan.

The purpose of the questionnaire is to gain insight into a few selected key issues at a strategic level. It is not designed to make comparative assessments of the performance of individual countries, but instead to act as verification of progress overall, and to identify any areas for intensified/adjusted efforts (potentially with associated options for support), as well as areas for celebration of success. Fuller assessments of progress will be based separately on the broader suite of indicators agreed in the Plan, including at a "mid-term" point in 2027, and again just prior to the Plan's end-date of 2030.

The questionnaire was endorsed by the Bureau and circulated to Parties for the first time (as document T-PVS/Inf(2024)12 rev) in September 2024. A summary of the responses received, together with a reflection on the conduct of the process, was presented to the 44th meeting of the Standing Committee in document T-PVS(2024)14.

The 2024 summary report, along with the Standing Committee's consideration of it, has allowed the first year's experience of the process to be treated as a pilot, and to be reviewed for any points that might be suggested as refinements for its future operation. The present document sets out the points that have emerged on this, and provides (a) a draft of the questionnaire proposed for use in 2025, taking these points into account, and (b) a suggestion for the timeframe to be followed. **The Working Group is invited to provide feedback on this, and to confirm a decision on the way forward.**

Points emerging from the 2024 experience

(i) An eight week response period (with a deadline dictated by document preparation timelines for the Standing Committee meeting) was considered by the Working Group to give countries sufficient time to answer the four questions. In the event, however, only one Party responded by the deadline. By delaying completion of the synthesis report, a further five late responses were taken into account; but this remained too small a proportion of the 49 Convention Parties to be a basis for any general conclusions. It is possible that the low response rate was affected by 2024 being the first year that the full Strategic Plan had been in effect; although given that the goals in the Plan had already been agreed in 2021, that should not have been an obstacle to commenting on progress at least with the goals.

(ii) Many of the responses to the question concerning "Major progress achievements" referred to actions that took place before 2024; so future annual operation of the process may need to urge a tighter focus on the year in question.

(iii) Responses to the question concerning "Major progress achievements" tended to describe advances driven by agendas beyond the Council of Europe, such as EU Directives and other Conventions. Future updates may need to try to focus more on instances where the Bern Convention itself (and its Strategic Plan) can be attributed as the driver for items of relevant progress.

(iv) All of the recorded "major achievements" related to plans, frameworks, acts of designation and programme initiatives. None addressed any actual resulting conservation outcomes for habitats or species; so these "outcome" issues should where possible be more closely considered in future (in conjunction of course with the wider regime of indicators and reporting for the Strategic Plan as a whole).

(v) The questionnaire in future might usefully invite respondents to relate their information about achievements and challenges in the "update" year to the answer they gave in the preceding year about "key national priorities for the year ahead". (Such an approach would not have been applicable in the first year of the process, but could be considered from now on).

Views from Parties during Standing Committee 44

(i) During discussion on this item at its 44th meeting in December 2024, the Standing Committee invited the Working Group to consider allowing more time for Parties to provide their voluntary national updates. One Party suggested issuing the questionnaire before the summer. (This point is addressed further under the section headed "Timeframe" below).

(ii) The synthesis report (T-PVS(2024)14) noted that the individual country update reports constituted a potentially rich resource of informative material about implementation experiences and future priorities, but that no position had been taken on whether and how to make this resource more openly available, for example via an area of the Bern Convention website. The Committee suggested that the questionnaire could ask each country whether it was willing to have its response made available in this way.

(iii) The synthesis report summarised the key points reported in the updates, but although it named the six countries whose responses were included, it did not identify the sources of the individual listed points. The Committee felt that in future it would be beneficial to do so.

(iv) While underlining the voluntary nature of the national updates, it has at the same time been recognised, given the central guiding importance of the Strategic Plan for the Convention, that the Standing Committee should have at its disposal each year at least some basic indicative information on the progress being made towards the objectives agreed in the Plan. On this basis, Parties had been particularly encouraged to engage with the process and to submit their updates. One intervention in the meeting suggested that this encouragement should not be too strong (presumably so as to emphasise further the discretionary nature of the process); while at the same time another intervention expressed the hope for a better response rate in 2025. Clearly, the more Parties that decide voluntarily to submit something, the more useful the process will be.

Draft updated questionnaire for 2025

Taking all the foregoing into account, the Annex to the present document provides a suggestion for the questionnaire to be used in 2025. Nothing in the review of experience from 2024 and the deliberations of the Standing Committee suggests any need to alter the core questions it contains, so these remain unchanged, and hopefully they will be confirmed as unchanging for future years as well, to preserve comparability of the results from one period to the next.

Minor changes otherwise reflected in the Annex below are therefore as follows:

Covering page / "Explanatory note"

- References to 2024 changed to 2025, and reference to the applicable Standing Committee meeting updated.
- Addition of the word "again" in relation to the Standing Committee opportunity, to adapt to the fact that this is no longer the first occasion of inviting national updates.
- Addition of the words "the same" before the words "four main questions", and "as in 2024" after those words, to give reassurance about consistency and comparability, and that this is not a new type of request.
- Addition of a sentence that says: "We would encourage you to keep your responses focused specifically on updates relating to the present year, and to the Bern Convention and the objectives in the Strategic Plan".
- Response deadline changed to 24 October (see "Timeframe" section below).

Questionnaire section on "Administrative information"

- Reference to 2024 changed to 2025.
- Addition of a question: "Do you consent to the Bern Convention Secretariat making this response publicly available?" (Yes/No).

Questionnaire sections I, II and III

- References to 2024 changed to 2025.

Questionnaire section IV

- Reference to 2025 (for future priorities) changed to 2026.

At end

- Response deadline changed to 24 October (see "Timeframe" section below).

Note that once the Working Group has agreed on the necessary 2025 adjustments (as above, or in a modified form according to Working Group advice), there will need to be a check that the sense of the English language changes will translate satisfactorily into the French language version.

Timeframe

As mentioned above, it has been suggested that allowing a longer interval between issuing the questionnaire and the deadline for submitting updates might help to generate a better level of response. The 2024 synthesis report and the discussion at Standing Committee 44 noted that there is a balance to strike in this, between (a) giving sufficient time for Parties to compile their responses, (b) compiling them sufficiently late in the year to allow a summary of progress during the year in question to be provided, and (c) setting a deadline that fits with timeframes for drafting, translating and making available documents for the relevant meeting of the Standing Committee.

The timeframe in 2024 involved circulation of the questionnaire in September, with eight weeks for response by a deadline in early November, envisaging then a very rapid generation of a synthesis report in time for the Standing Committee's translation and document posting deadlines.

A suggestion has been made to bring forward the circulation date in 2025 to an earlier stage in the year. This would give Parties more months in which to answer the four update questions. A set of specific dates on this basis is suggested below for consideration. As noted above, there is an appreciable weakness in using information that is written too early, if it is ostensibly intended to present an update on the picture for the whole of the year. Parties might be advised to have regard to this, and to include as far as possible the most "up to the minute" information in their updates. The weakness of this will however diminish over time, as the accumulation of updates (hopefully) presents a picture of progression from year to year, making it less important when a year is deemed to begin and end.

Potential timeframe for 2025

- Questionnaire (in two languages) issued to Parties	Wednesday 30 April
- Deadline for responses to be received by the Secretariat	Friday 10 October
- Summary of national update results completed by consultant (in English)	Friday 31 October
- Summary of national update results (two languages) posted for SC45	Friday 7 November
- Standing Committee 45th meeting	8-12 December

ANNEX

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
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STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE BERN CONVENTION TO 2030

Request for voluntary national updates on Strategic Plan implementation

Explanatory note

In paragraph 2 of its Recommendation No. 220 (2023) on the implementation of the Strategic Plan for the Bern Convention for the period to 2030, the Standing Committee recommended that Contracting Parties:

> *"prior to each Standing Committee meeting, send an update to the Secretariat on any major national achievements regarding progress with the Strategic Plan such as in relation to point 1 of this Recommendation, the compilation of which will be made available to the Standing Committee for information".*

The point 1 referred to, recommended that Contracting Parties:

> *"reflect and support relevant elements of the Vision and Strategic Plan to 2030 in and through national policies and related measures, including the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), in relation to the conservation of wild flora, fauna and their habitats".*

A simple format of the same **four main questions** as in 2024 is provided below to guide the provision of a brief (voluntary) update on the key implementation advances you may wish to report for your country for 2025.

We would encourage you to keep your responses focused specifically on updates relating to the present year, and to the Bern Convention and the objectives in the Strategic Plan.

Please return your completed questionnaire no later than Friday24 October, to the Secretariat at bern.convention@coe.int.

It is expected that the Standing Committee at its 45th meeting (Strasbourg, 8-12 December 2025) will again have the opportunity to take note of the progress reflected in these national updates, and to consider any key priorities for future action.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

The Bern Convention Secretariat.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Name of Contracting Party: …

Compiler of this 2025 questionnaire response:

Name and title …

Full name of institution …

Telephone …

Email …

Do you consent to the Bern Convention Secretariat making this response publicly available?

Yes ☐

No ☐

I - MAJOR PROGRESS ACHIEVEMENTS

In your country in 2025, what have been the most successful achievements so far in implementing the Bern Convention Vision and Strategic Plan to 2030?

(As far as possible, please indicate the goals and/or specific targets in the Strategic Plan to which your information relates):

Comments:

II - OVERALL POLICY

To what extent are relevant elements of the Bern Convention Vision and Strategic Plan to 2030 reflected in and supported by national policies and related measures in your country?

(*Please tick the box for the answer that most closely resembles your country's situation in 2025*).

- Only very weakly in most respects, and this needs improvement ☐
- Only partially – some aspects are adequately covered, but there are significant gaps ☐
- Most relevant aspects are adequately covered, and there are no significant gaps ☐
- There is a national policy or related measure that refers directly to the Bern Convention Strategic Plan and is explicitly designed to support it. ☐

Please add any further information to amplify your answer, and if possible please also comment on what support is offered for the Bern Convention Vision and Strategic Plan by your country's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP).

III - GREATEST CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED SO FAR

In your country in 2025, what have been the greatest challenges experienced so far in implementing the Bern Convention Vision and Strategic Plan to 2030?

If you wish, you may add information about the specific kinds of support (other than financial) that your country may need to assist it in addressing the challenge(s) identified.

IV - KEY NATIONAL PRIORITIES FOR 2026

What are the most important priorities for action to implement the Bern Convention Vision and Strategic Plan in your country in the coming year?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return your responses to bern.convention@coe.int before Friday 24 October 2025.