



Strasbourg, 27 June 2022

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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE  
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Standing Committee**

42<sup>nd</sup> meeting

Strasbourg, 28 November - 2 December 2022

**Group of Experts on Biodiversity and Climate Change**

**23 May 2022, 9.00-13.00 (CEST)**

*online meeting*

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**-MEETING REPORT-**

*Document prepared by  
the Secretariat of the Bern Convention*

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**The meeting of the Group of Experts on Biodiversity and Climate Change was held virtually on 23 May 2022.**

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- Take note of the report of the meeting of the Group of Experts;
- Examine and, if appropriate, endorse the revised Terms of Reference of the Group of Experts on Biodiversity and Climate Change as presented in the document T-PVS(2022)09;
- Examine the findings of the survey on the progress in the implementation of Recommendation No. 206 (2019) and the suggestions from the Group of Experts of potential areas for closer attention, and exchange views on follow up work;
- Take note of the conclusions of the Group of Experts on the reporting on the recommendations of the Standing Committee focusing on Climate Change;
- Welcome the results of the LIFE project NaturAdapt;
- Take note of the areas of work the Group of Experts will focus on in 2023 and beyond.

### **1. Opening of the meeting**

The Chair, Linda Dalen, opened the meeting and welcomed all participants. All participants introduced themselves in a short tour de table.

### **2. Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda was adopted without amendments.

### **3. Mandate of Group of Experts**

The Secretariat informed the participants that in 2021, for the first time ever, the Council of Europe had adopted a Strategic Framework where environmental degradation and climate change were among the priorities. In the meantime, the Standing Committee had also adopted a vision for the period to 2030 which states that by 2030 declines in biodiversity are halted, leading to recovery of wildlife and habitats to improve the lives of people and contributing to the health of the planet. Although climate change was not explicitly mentioned in the vision, it was assumed that it was one driver responsible for biodiversity decline and for the deterioration of people's well-being and that consequently Parties were committed to fight against climate change.

The Secretariat recalled the mandate of the Group of Experts which had been shared with all participants prior to the meeting. According to the mandate dating back in 2006, the group was expected to *review the effects of climate change on biodiversity and propose advice and guidance for use in developing appropriate adaptation and management policies for the conservation of the biological diversity*. The Group was also expected to present to the Standing Committee specific proposals, guidance and/or Recommendations to help Parties address the challenges of climate change in the implementation of the Convention and its objectives.

Under the impulsion of this Group, ten Recommendations were adopted by the Standing Committee in the period 2006-2019, including some specific ones, for instance on climate change and mountain regions, climate change in European islands, invasive alien species and climate change and Conservation translocations under changing climatic conditions. As many other international organisations were now working on climate change, participants were invited to discuss whether a Group of Experts on the topic under the Bern Convention should prevail and what its priorities would be.

The Group acknowledged that the current mandate was partially outdated, especially in regard to the documents on climate change and biodiversity data that it referred to. Also, more recent, important reports that form a baseline for the Group were missing. The participants expressed a strong interest to maintain the Group of Experts because of its important key function in keeping the Standing Committee informed, but also watching the state of the art in new data.

In the discussion, it was acknowledged that the impact of climate change on biodiversity was increasing and in the meantime the role of nature-based solutions for climate challenges was increasingly appreciated, hence, the Group of Experts' role would become even more important. The Group had the ability to engage and to bridge policy and practice. Participants believed that the asset of the Group of Experts was the geographical scope of the Convention and its connection with other scientific/technical groups under the Convention. They stressed that climate change was an overarching issue. Participants further suggested that the mandate should be aligned with the Bern Convention Vision adopted by the Standing Committee last year and its Strategic Plan in preparation but also with other MEA's strategic document. Finally, participants stressed the importance of continuing focussing on protected areas

The Group agreed that a revised draft mandate would be prepared by the Secretariat and circulated among the participants for written comments and subsequently brought to the attention of Standing Committee for possible adoption.

#### **4. Implementation of Recommendation No. 206 (2019)**

Recommendation No. 206 (2019) on nature-based solutions and management of protected areas in the face of climate change foresaw that Contracting Parties would report on the progress in its implementation in 2022.

An online questionnaire consisting of 43 questions and structured around 4 themes (1. Policy and strategy, 2. Nature-based solutions in the face of climate change, 3. Management of protected areas in the face of climate change and 4. Communication and capacity building) was shared with Contracting Parties. Out of the 51 Contracting Parties that received the questionnaire, 20 provided responses (39%).

Mr Lawrence Jones-Walters, presented to the participants the findings of the survey. In terms of policy and strategy, the performance of the 20 responding Contracting Parties was close to the benchmark. All countries were planning to develop a strategy which addresses climate change and biodiversity. Almost 80% had a ratified strategy, a completed strategy waiting for ratification, or a strategy in development. Among the ratified strategies, all of them had targets that should be delivered within 10 years or sooner. However, the delivery of actions and the achievement of targets was highly variable.

In terms of nature-based solutions in the face of climate change, the performance was found to be below the benchmark. Action was required for future reviews to improve the majority of national climate change strategies that had poor (or no) measures for biodiversity. National level studies and initiatives were needed to generate greater knowledge of patterns of shifts in species distributions, and which species were most vulnerable to climate change. There was relatively good integration of nature-based solutions in both climate change and biodiversity strategies, and in some countries, they were already being delivered in practice. Most programmes enhancing nature-based solutions and ecosystem services were supported by financial subsidies to some extent. In terms of values associated with biodiversity and ecosystem services being integrated within economic analysis and decision-making processes most countries also said that this took place to some extent. Agricultural subsidies were cited as damaging to biodiversity by every country. A number of other subsidies associated with fisheries and forestry policy, transport and energy sectors were also mentioned as having a negative impact.

The management of protected areas in the face of climate change was well below the benchmark. Generally, little progress had been made in relation to monitoring the impact of climate change on protected areas. Sites, habitats and species under particular threat or pressure had not yet been identified. In most cases management plans were not updated to respond to changes caused by climate change; and whilst national strategies were seen to contain detailed goals for addressing climate related issues, in many cases they had yet to be implemented. In relation to the implementation of measures to adapt to climate change in protected areas, the integration of these aspects was in general insufficient. In most cases there was no assessment of how the network of protected areas responded to climate change and there were very few programmes in place to adapt the network of protected areas to climate change. However, most countries had plans to extend the network and improve the connectivity of their protected areas. Ecological corridors were largely integrated in land use planning processes and there was evidence of good cross-country cooperation on biodiversity and climate change. Problems included the lack of human and financial resources and the absence of sufficient data and information, especially on which species should be assessed.

In regard to communication and capacity building, the performance of the responding Contracting Parties was at or above the benchmark. There was much awareness raising activity amongst the majority of countries, and there were broad public awareness campaigns. In countries with limited resources communication via projects and programmes was particularly important. Where there were indigenous people, their knowledge was integrated within biodiversity / climate change programmes. For education there was existing activity in relation to both school curricula and higher education programmes. Agriculture and forestry were two sectors that had received attention in relation to awareness-raising campaigns. In relation to the training of practitioners, the majority were carrying out or were planning

to carry out training. Training was often a component within funded projects and programmes - and this has an important vehicle for awareness raising. The responses to questions in relation to participation were generally positive. In some cases, legislation required public participation but many countries recognised the important role that local communities play in the management of protected areas. The majority of countries had national programmes encouraging the participation of local communities in the designation and management of protected areas.

Participants in the Group of Experts regretted the low participation rate in the survey which was also witnessing a lack of engagement and action of Contracting Parties. Bearing in mind that Parties were at different stages of the journey, the collection and showcasing of best practices was still useful. Participants also assumed that the urgency of the situation was not understood. In particular, participants were disappointed by the outcomes of the section on the management of protected areas in the face of climate change. They considered that the resources and materials to elaborate and implement adaptive management plans existed and were available.

Three potential areas for closer attention were identified by the Expert Group:

- Protected areas: include adaptation measures in management plans and monitor climate change impacts;
- Data and information: increase knowledge on vulnerable habitats and species at country level;
- Strategy implementation: explore potential to exchange best practice and initiate targeted training and communication.

## **5. Reporting by Parties on the recommendations of the Standing Committee focusing on Climate Change**

In 2012 already the Standing Committee adopted Recommendation No. 159 on the effective implementation of guidance for Parties on biodiversity and climate change in an attempt to improve Parties' implementation of the Bern Convention standards in this field. The reason for the adoption of this Recommendation was the observation that the very large number of recommended actions throughout the years created a deflation in their implementation at national level.

In 2017, the idea of a systematic reporting on the implementation of the Recommendations of Standing Committee in the field of climate change was brought to the attention of the restricted Group of Experts on Biodiversity and Climate Change. The reporting proposal aimed to synthesise progress, identify gaps in order to be in capacity to propose remedies in the form of support activities or guidance.

The restricted Group of Experts agreed that such a reporting:

- should take place every two years;
- should be organised around the headings included in the guidance document T-PVS/Inf(2017)13 presented in 2017;
- A draft reporting form should be developed with the support of external consultants;
- Focus on outcomes, include both qualitative and quantitative information on progress at national level and enable learning between Parties as much as possible;
- Should include an introductory part to explain the reasons behind the reporting request;
- Include guidance on how questions can be answered and terms interpreted, when necessary.

There had been little follow-up reporting since and the capacities of the Secretariat of the Bern Convention was limited in terms of assisting the reporting and aiding implementations. The recommendations were therefore also aimed at facilitating the work. The meeting at hand and monitoring of implementation of the standards also served gaining an overview about difficulties with implementation.

Participants acknowledged that due to the urgency of the topic, some type of reporting should be undertaken. Reporting was also considered as useful, as it fostered Parties to take action. Participants

agreed that the reporting should remain simple, focus on specific issues and help identify best practices from which Parties could learn from. As climate change was an overarching issue participants suggested that it could be treated in a cross-sectoral more general report.

## **6. Climate Change and Invasive Alien Species (IAS)**

Mr Giuseppe Brundu gave a presentation about a draft position paper on risks associated with the use of invasive alien tree species as a nature-based solutions to mitigate climate change. Mr Brundu informed that there were concerns amongst experts that nature-based solutions would be a source of introduction of new invasive alien tree species. However, the use of non-native tree species could not be completely avoided. Mr Brundu further stressed that climate change might enhance the effect of the distribution of invasive alien species and would also impact soil hydrology etc.

A revised version of the draft position paper would be available in June/July of 2022, incorporating the comments of Contracting Parties.

## **7. LIFE project NaturAdapt**

Mr Olivier de Sadeleer, Project Manager at EUROPARC Federation provided the Group of Experts with an update on the implementation of the project started in 2019. The project aimed at integrating climate change into protected area management practices involving many different cross-sector partners. It primarily involved vulnerability assessments, adaptation measures, a collaborative platform and online courses.

Mr Sadeleer informed that the project delivered a climate change methodology for protected areas managers including climate change scenarios, vulnerability assessments, and adaptation measures and that 6 experiments were available online for download. Key learnings from the project were that uncertainties needed to be accepted, climate change effects needed to be understood better, the process was future-oriented and a lot of the learnings could be achieved in the journey itself rather than have to stand ready at the beginning.

Mr Sadeleer concluded that it was critical to enable the co-design, concrete integration and implementation of balanced and coordinated environment management schemes across all sectors and governance levels.

## **8. Future work of the Group of Experts**

Participants suggested that the Group of Experts focussed on the implementation of agreed recommendations, on the topics of climate change and protected area management as well nature-based solutions and that best practices continued to be showcased.

Participants further supported that the meeting of Group of Experts on Biodiversity and Climate Change was again organised back-to-back with the meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks in 2024.

## **9. Any other business**

No comments were made under Any Other Business.

## **10. Conclusions of the meeting**

Many matters of process had to be discussed, but the meeting was perceived to be productive. For the future, it was considered to meet less frequently for general matters, but more often and short on specific topics to maintain the dynamic. The chair closed the meeting.