



5th SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES

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“Migratory waterbirds and people - sharing wetlands”

REPORT ON NATIONAL REPORTING AND THE ONLINE REPORTING SYSTEM (ORS)

Prepared by the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat

I. Background Information

1. Article V, paragraph (c), of the Agreement requires Parties to prepare a national report on their implementation of the Agreement with a particular reference to the conservation measures undertaken. The original format of the reports was determined by the first session of the Meeting of the Parties through Resolution 1.3.

2. Article V, paragraph (c), of the Agreement also stipulates that national reports shall be submitted to the Agreement Secretariat not less than one hundred and twenty days before the ordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties for which it has been prepared, and that copies of the submitted reports shall be circulated forthwith to the other Parties by the Agreement Secretariat.

II. National Reporting: Monitoring the Implementation of the Agreement and its Action Plan

3. Since the adoption of the first triennial national report format for AEWA through Resolution 1.3, Parties have repeatedly acknowledged the importance of national reporting as a means of monitoring implementation. It is generally expected that the implementation of the Agreement and its Action Plan be enhanced by regular review of national implementation through a process of national reporting.

4. Apart from MOP2, Resolutions on the topic of national reporting have been adopted at every AEWA MOP to date: Resolution 1.3 established the first triennial national reporting format; Resolution 3.5 instructed the Secretariat to develop an online national report format, which was then adopted and approved by the Parties through Resolution 4.7. This is also the format which is being used for reporting by Contracting Parties to MOP5.

5. At the Sessions of the Meeting of the Parties, the Parties have also expressed the desire for AEWA to adopt forms of national reporting which are not unnecessarily complex and do not duplicate the data and information gathering already undertaken by other Conventions and related international programmes.

6. AEWA Parties have also repeatedly emphasised the need for cooperation and synergies in the area of national reporting. For example, Resolution 1.3 instructs both the Technical Committee and the Secretariat to liaise actively with related international conventions, the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) and other international organizations on issues relating to national reporting, including on the harmonisation of data and information collection and management, so as to encourage the development of synergies. Resolution 3.5 highlights that the national reporting format should seek to advance harmonisation of reporting with other international biodiversity agreements through the development of common reporting modules, while Resolution 4.7 requests the Secretariat to work closely with the CMS Secretariat and with the assistance of UNEP to advance harmonisation of the national report formats of AEWA and CMS further, where this is possible.

III. Online National Reporting: Development History

7. In May 2005, the 6th Meeting of the Technical Committee recommended the development of an online facility as a tool for better harmonisation of the AEWA reporting templates. At MOP3, the Secretariat received the task to develop the online national reporting format through Resolution 3.5, which instructed the Secretariat to develop the format in close cooperation with the Technical Committee and the CMS Secretariat and to seek to advance harmonisation of reporting with other international biodiversity agreements.

8. Support towards the development of an online national reporting facility came from UNEP and the Government of Norway. From 2006 to 2008, UNEP-WCMC worked with the UNEP Division of Environmental Law and Conventions (DELIC) and the Secretariats of six biodiversity-related conventions and agreements, on a Norwegian-funded UNEP project on *Knowledge Management for MEAs*.¹ The objective of the project was to improve implementation of the biodiversity-related agreements through the strategic use of information. The development of an online national reporting facility, initially for CMS, AEWA and CITES was one of the expected outputs of this project.

9. It is important to note, that the envisioned online reporting facility was one of several components of this project and that an analytical component for the reporting facility was planned in a follow-up Knowledge Management for MEAs project.

10. At MOP4 in September 2008, the Secretariat presented the online national report format as it had been developed by the Secretariat in close cooperation with the Technical Committee and deployed online by UNEP-WCMC in the context of the above- mentioned UNEP project. While the basic template (format) of the AEWA report was ready at the time, the underlying reporting system had not been thoroughly tested. With Resolution 4.7, Parties subsequently adopted and approved the use of the online national report format (as presented in document AEWA/MOP 4.20) for reporting of the Contracting Parties to future Sessions of the MOP.

11. In December 2009, the Secretariat was informed by UNEP-WCMC that the online reporting facility supporting the new AEWA online national report format which had been developed in the context of the above-mentioned project needed to be re-developed mainly due to technical reasons. The Secretariat was informed that a new online reporting system had to be built in a more flexible programming language (Ruby on Rails). The new online reporting facility would be built as an online report generator, which could be potentially used by several MEA Secretariats, enabling easy creation and updating of reporting templates.

12. From January 2010 to September 2011 both AEWA's Technical Officer and Information Officer worked directly with UNEP-WCMC programmers to develop, test and refine the new Online Reporting System (ORS) and to customize the AEWA national reporting template using the ORS.

13. On 12 October 2011, the Secretariat was finally able to launch its first online national reporting process using the Online Reporting System (ORS) by sending the first user access credentials for the MOP5 national reports to designated national respondents. Anticipating the potential future use of the ORS by CMS and its instruments for online national reporting, the ORS was already customized as the CMS Family Online Reporting System.

14. The Secretariat would like to thank the Government of Norway for its generous support to the first UNEP project on "Knowledge Management for MEAs" without which online national reporting to AEWA and the Online Reporting System (ORS) for use by the CMS Family and other MEAs would not have materialized. The Secretariat would also like to thank the management and development team at UNEP-WCMC for their commitment to this project and looks forward to collaborating with the Centre to enhance the ORS further and boost support for its further development and potential use by other MEAs also beyond the CMS Family.

¹ The full title of the UNEP DELIC project was "Strengthening the Implementation of the Biodiversity-related Conventions through the Strategic Use of Information: Knowledge Management among MEAs".

IV. Online National Reporting for MOP5, the Online Reporting System (ORS) and its Functionalities

15. The ORS is a state-of-the-art electronic platform for online reporting which allows for the submission of national reports via a highly customizable, web-based interface and template. It was conceived and implemented as one of the components of the Norwegian-funded UNEP Knowledge Management among MEAs project and is a reporting tool especially customized to the needs of Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs) and their online national reporting processes.

16. AEWA is the first MEA to fully adapt and use the ORS for its reporting, but it is expected that after a successful completion of the AEWA MOP5 reporting cycle and adoption of the tool by AEWA MOP5, other MEAs, initially starting with the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and its associated instruments, will also begin using the ORS for their national reporting processes.

17. In contrast to most existing reporting systems which are hard coded, the ORS allows MEA Secretariats both to design and update their national reporting templates and run their reporting processes independently and in all UN languages. Operating the system requires no programming skills on the side of the MEA Secretariat, allowing non-technical staff to make the changes to the templates directly.

18. The ORS includes numerous possibilities for building and customizing individual questionnaires including many different question types, dependencies, flexible re-ordering of questions and sophisticated looping questions and filtering options. On the respondent side, the system allows for delegation of entire sections or even individual questions by designated national respondents, meaning that an MEA Focal Point can assign a section or a specific question of a given national report to those national experts most suitable to answer the selected part of the report.

19. The AEWA Online National Report Template makes full use of the features presently included in the ORS. The Secretariat has also managed to configure the template using the ORS so that the AEWA national reporting template now includes photos and scientific and English and French common names of almost all of the 255 waterbird species covered by AEWA and those of several alien species.

20. In terms of reporting process, the Secretariat has pre-filled all online national reports based on the information submitted by Parties to previous Sessions of the MOP as well as with information from previously agreed scientific reference literature and issued the user access credentials to designated national respondents as soon as the reports were prepared. The Secretariat has also assisted national respondents with trouble shooting and advice on how to review and update their online national reports and has also developed user guides in both English and French on how to utilize the ORS.

21. With the exception of considerable Secretariat staff time invested, the development costs for the ORS were entirely covered by UNEP-WCMC as a project delivered in the context of the *UNEP Knowledge Management for MEAs Project*. UNEP-WCMC has also agreed to host the ORS and has guaranteed its smooth running at no extra cost to the Secretariat until the completion of the MOP5 reporting cycle.

V. Next steps for Online National Reporting: Maintenance and Hosting, Development of the Analytical Tool and Other Long-Term Priorities

22. Article V, paragraph (c) of the Agreement and Resolutions 1.3, 3.5 and 4.7 are indicative of the importance of national reporting within the Agreement. The issue of online national reporting became a priority starting with TC6 and MOP3. While Parties requested the Secretariat to move towards online national reporting at MOP3, it is important to note that the Secretariat did not have the funding in place to allow it to embark on such an ambitious and expensive project on its own.

23. Developing an online reporting system for AEWA national reporting was only made possible through the Norwegian-funded *UNEP Knowledge Management for MEAs Project*. The ORS developed by UNEP-WCMC in the framework of this international project is however more than just a reporting tool for

AEWA. It is a generic report generation tool, which can potentially be used by many other MEA Secretariats. While this project goal made the development of the ORS very complex, it has resulted in a far more sophisticated tool which is already attracting the interest of other MEA Secretariats, including CMS and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

24. An inter-MEA working group on online national reporting established under the UNEP-driven *Information and Knowledge Management (IKM) for MEAs Initiative*, is currently conducting an assessment of online national reporting tools developed for and used by MEAs. The ORS developed by UNEP-WCMC is one of the reporting tools being reviewed. As AEWA is the first MEA to actually use the ORS for its online national reporting, the experiences of both the Contracting Parties and the Secretariat with the system during the MOP5 reporting cycle will likely be of great interest to this working group and to other MEA Secretariats potentially interested in adopting the ORS for their online national reporting needs.

25. Provided the online national reporting process to MOP5 using the ORS will be considered to have been successful and the ORS will be adopted to be used for reporting to MOP6, immediate future priorities for national reporting for AEWA are set out in paragraphs 26-29.

Maintenance and Hosting of the ORS

26. UNEP-WCMC has informed the Secretariat that, given a successful reporting cycle to MOP5, it will be charging the Secretariat £1,950 (ca. €2,300 – €2,500) annually for the hosting, basic maintenance and support services related to operating the ORS system. Hence, if the decision is made to continue using the ORS as the electronic platform for national reporting by the Parties at MOP5 in its present form, these basic maintenance costs will need to be provided for in the next AEWA budget. Once this funding is secured, the Secretariat should also make contractual arrangements with UNEP-WCMC to formalize these hosting, support and maintenance arrangements. Improvements and refinement of the systems functionalities will have to be covered by additional voluntary contributions.

Development of an Analytical Tool

27. It is important to note, that the development of an Analytical Tool linked to the ORS was not part of the original Norwegian-funded *UNEP Knowledge Management for MEAs Project*, but was left open as a component to be developed in subsequent Knowledge Management-related projects. An Analytical Tool would allow for instantaneous and automated analysis of the national reporting data submitted and should be designed in a way to allow easy, web-based access to customized reports. As the ORS was developed as a generic online national reporting tool for potential use by many MEAs, the ORS analysis component should also be designed in a flexible way, allowing Secretariats to easily design customized analysis features for their national reporting data submitted through the ORS.

28. As it is not clear whether a follow-up Knowledge Management project will materialize in the near future, the Secretariat will need to secure funds for the development of the Analytical Tool. However, as other MEAs, including CMS might be adopting the ORS for online national reporting; the associated development costs and fundraising efforts should be shared with other participating MEAs as well as with UNEP-WCMC. An initial estimate for the development of the Analytical Tool has been received by the Secretariat from UNEP-WCMC. The costs are estimated to amount to 90,000 – 100,000 £ GBP.

Other Long-Term Priorities

29. Other general long-term priorities linked to online national reporting would be to try to:

- Enhance the actual reporting format and template (Streamlining and optimizing the template itself taking the feedback received from Contracting Parties into account);
- Link and combine the national reporting database with other available datasets, such as the Critical Site Network (CSN) Tool;
- Improve the rate of submission and quality of reports (Offer joint training to Parties with other MEAs);

- Maximise the use of information submitted through national reports (Develop web-based analysis tools to display and make submitted data more accessible, comparable and appealing as publicly-accessible information);
- Gradually work towards harmonisation of reporting processes, making use of the Online Reporting System across the CMS Family and beyond.

Actions Requested from the Meeting of the Parties:

1. To take note of this report.
2. To review and adopt the draft Resolution AEWA/MOP5 DR1 *National Reporting and Online Reporting System*.