



Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions

Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage
Convention on Biological Diversity
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat
International Plant Protection Convention
International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
International Whaling Commission

Summary Report: Conference Call of the Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions

Thursday 30 April 2020

15:00-17:00 UK time

Brief Summary with Action Points:

The objective of the conference call was to share experiences on how BLG member organisations are coping under the COVID-19 lockdown, including postponement of meetings and preparation for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework under the new timeline. The list of participants is in Annex 1.

Item 1: Opening

The conference call was chaired by the Executive Secretary of the IWC. Through a *tour de table*, each BLG member provided brief updates on the impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of respective conventions, including postponement of statutory meetings and other events, lessons learnt from virtual meetings, as well as new initiatives launched in response to the pandemic.

Item 2: Preparation of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework

CBD provided an overview of the preparation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF), including revised a timeline for SBSTTA-24, SBI-3, OEWG3 and COP 15, and preparation of meeting documents including an updated document on goals and targets of the post-2020 GBF to be circulated for peer review by 25 May 2020 with three to four weeks for comments. It was agreed that it would be useful to set up a joint conference call with the Co-Chairs of OEWG to discuss the updated document during the peer review period.

Updates on the Bern 2 meeting were also provided by CBD, followed by a discussion primarily focused on the background document prepared by UNEP-WCMC. A number of BLG members wished to have the deadline for comments extended. It was agreed that it would be useful to hold a joint conference call with the UNEP Secretariat to discuss issues related to Bern 2.

Action Points:

- 1) *BLG members to jointly request for one-week extension of the submission of comments on the background document to the UNEP Secretariat; (DONE)*
- 2) *CBD on behalf of the BLG members to propose a joint conference call with the OEWG Co-Chairs to discuss the updated document for the post-2020 GBF after the draft is circulated for peer review;*

- 3) *CBD on behalf of the BLG members to propose a joint conference call with the UNEP Secretariat to discuss issues related to Bern 2.*

Item 3: Schedule of other meetings of the conventions and possibility of 'virtual' formats

Development of a live calendar of BLG-member events on SharePoint was proposed and CBD agreed to take the lead on this. Additional comments were provided regarding the impacts of COVID-19 on the implementation of activities, and it was considered valuable to share experiences of organizing virtual meetings among the BLG members in terms of technology used as well as decision-making.

Action Points:

- 1) *CBD to check with their IT team the timescale of setting up a live BLG calendar on SharePoint;*
- 2) *BLG members to share contact names of each IT focal point for future exchange on technical matters;*
- 3) *BLG members to share relevant information and documentation on virtual meetings to better adapt to the COVID-19 circumstances (for both technical and decision-making aspects).*

Item 4: UNGA Summit on Biodiversity in September 2020

The Co-Chairs of the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) for the UN Biodiversity Summit organized by the President of the UN General Assembly provided updates on the preparation of the Summit, including modality of the Summit and preparation of the concept note by IATF. Several BLG members expressed their willingness to actively engage in the Summit, and collective action such as preparing a joint paper was proposed while also taking into account the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. BLG communication focal points are already discussing joint messaging on COVID-19, and outcome of the discussion will be shared with BLG for further action.

Action Points:

- 1) *Co-Chairs of the Inter-Agency Task Force to share background information on the UN Biodiversity Summit, including the timetable for the development of the concept note as well as the draft outline for BLG's inputs; **(Draft outline has been circulated)***
- 2) *BLG members to explore possible joint action (e.g. joint BLG paper) for the Summit;*
- 3) *BLG communication focal points to share outcome of the discussion among the communication group on joint messaging on COVID-19.*

Detailed Summary (with hyperlinks where available):

Item 1: Opening

1. The Executive Secretary of the IWC, the Chair of the conference call, welcomed the participants and briefed the meeting agenda. The list of participants is in Annex I.
2. Through a *tour de table*, the Chair invited each BLG member to introduce participants and provide brief updates on the impact of COVID-19 on their operations:

WHC

- Bureau decided that [the World Heritage Committee session scheduled in June-July 2020 in Fuzhou, China](#) is to be postponed. New dates are not yet decided: it will be potentially held in November 2020, otherwise in 2021.
- UNESCO launched [a global campaign on the COVID-19 response](#). Videos from the World Heritage site managers have been collected through [#ShareOurHeritage campaign](#) which received millions of hits. The World Heritage sites have been severely affected in terms of socio-economic impacts on communities living in and around the sites, as well as increased logging and poaching due to the impact on the ability to monitor the sites.
- [A Global map showing the World Heritage sites closure](#) has been developed. About 90% of the countries have currently closed their World Heritage sites totally or partially.

CBD

- Progress and updates on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework as well as on the UNGA Biodiversity Summit will be provided under respective agenda items.

CITES

- The Animals and Plants Committee meetings scheduled in Geneva in mid-July 2020 will be proposed to be held online in view of the current global situation. The Secretariat is sending a proposal for online meetings to the Standing Committee members for their decisions by mid-May. The Secretariat is working with UNEP to find ways to compensate costs for participation in order to ensure equal access, given that many countries have costs associated with joining the online meetings. Meetings will be reduced to three hours per day to accommodate the time difference, rules of the meetings will be adapted accordingly.
- Lessons learnt from the experience of participating in online meetings organized by CBD and other exchanges.

CMS

- The [COP 13](#) was successfully held with participation of many BLG colleagues. Some participants could not attend the COP due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Some other meetings have been cancelled, deferred or changed to virtual.
- CMS has been involved in zoonotic diseases, including avian influenza in 2006. The topic is very relevant to what CMS is already doing in terms of linkages between infectious and zoonotic diseases, and connection between nature, wildlife, destruction of habitats, ecosystems and agriculture etc. CMS is trying to strengthen the work while also addressing incorrect information such as threats posed by bats to humans.

IPPC

- A number of meetings have been postponed or cancelled, including the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures which has been postponed until further notice. The Bureau is actively working to find solutions for decisions to be taken on behalf of the Commission. The Committees are working remotely using an [Online Comment System](#).
- The Secretariat is in consultation with the FAO management to extend some of the key global activities for the [International Year of Plant Health](#) to the first half of 2021, including the ministerial segment and the International Plant Health Conference initially scheduled for October 2020 in Helsinki.

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

- The Scientific and Technical Review Panel scheduled for March 2020 was cancelled and tasks are progressing virtually. [Standing Committee](#) 58 scheduled for June 2020 has been rescheduled for October 2020. These decisions were made remotely by the Standing Committee.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has been affecting the implementation of the Convention, especially in terms of decision-making towards the Standing Committee 58 and COP14 scheduled for 2021. While many contracting Parties are in confinement, some Parties managed to update information and even submit the designation of Wetlands of International Importance.

ITPGRFA

- The Governing Body meeting is scheduled for the end of 2021 in India and no major meetings are scheduled for 2020. Some meetings have been changed to virtual while utilizing an online commentary mechanism.
- The Secretariat is working with the FAO for the assessment of the impact of COVID-19 in its area of work. An assessment for international collection of plant genetic resources has been initiated under the guidance of the Bureau. While no major risk has been reported for the conservation of genetic materials, major impacts have been identified for the distribution in gene banks as well as field activities related to the regeneration of the materials.

IWC

- Ms. Imogen Webster has recently joined IWC as a programme officer.
- Two meetings are scheduled for 2020. The [Scientific Committee](#) from 12-25 May has been moved to online Zoom meeting with plenary and sub-committee sessions. There has been a challenge in scheduling a number of sessions while taking into account time difference.
- The [IWC Commission meeting](#) is still currently scheduled for September/October 2020 in Portorož, Slovenia. The decision is still pending, and updates will be provided in due course.

Item 2: Preparation of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework

3. CBD provided an overview of the preparation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF) followed by questions:

- [SBSTTA-24 and SBI-3](#) rescheduled for August 2020 (subject to change).
- The Co-Chairs need 9 weeks minimum between SBI-3 and the Open-ended Working Group (OEWG3) scheduled in Cali, and another 9 weeks minimum between OEWG3 and COP 15. COP 15 to be held in 2021.
- Updated document on goals, targets and components of the post-2020 GBF will be published by the Co-Chairs by 25 May for a 4-week peer review. The final wording will be validated during SBSTTA.
- Documents on performance indicators, baselines, SDGs linkage and glossary (definitions of terms by the Co-Chairs) for SBSTTA will be made available by 6 July (i.e. 6 weeks before SBSTTA-24).
- SBI-3 has 7 agenda items related to the post-2020 GBF. Documents for SBI to be available by end of June, two documents (post-2020 GBF, cooperation with other conventions) will be kept open until the last minute.
- Notifications will be sent shortly for 1) regional webinars on the peer review document by the Co-Chairs in May-June, and 2) online thematic consultation on sustainable use. A round of webinars with stakeholders is planned to familiarize users with online tools.
- CBD could organize another conference call with the Co-Chairs whenever needed.

Questions addressed to CBD:

- Clarification on the document on the financial mechanism, including timeframe for providing inputs (CMS) → Timeframe has been moved back due to the current situation. While CBD aims to publish document by end of June, final deadline for providing advice from other conventions will be COP 15. CBD COP expressed such advice should come from the governing bodies of other conventions. Given the time constraint, it is also an opportunity for the secretariats of other conventions to provide proposed advice to the SBI, reflecting their priorities for the post-2020 GBF and in view of GEF-8.
- Clarification on the timeline for submitting inputs to the document on goals and targets of the post-2020 GBF (Ramsar Convention on Wetlands) → Submission can be made during the peer review process (minimum 3 weeks, maximum 4 weeks).
- Clarification on the SBI document on cooperation with other conventions and the timeline for providing inputs (Ramsar Convention on Wetlands) → The document is on CBD's cooperation with other conventions. Two components: 1) to synthesize the cooperation and 2) to provide concrete advice at a strategic level to strengthen cooperation which is to be consulted through the Bern 2 process.

4. CBD provided updates on Bern 2 meeting and background document of UNEP-WCMC followed by questions:

- BLG was well represented in the first Bern 2 webinar. There was a strong wish to organize this as a physical meeting immediately before SBSTTA-24. If SBSTTA does not take place

in August 2020, alternative dates and venue for Bern 2 will be considered with UNEP and the Swiss government, including the possibility of holding as a virtual meeting.

Questions and comments:

- Cut-off date to decide whether SBSTTA and SBI to take place in August (WHC) → Bern 2 is currently scheduled for the last two weeks of August to be held in Montreal but it all depends on the situation and is subject to change (CBD).
- Comments related to the background document of UNEP-WCMC:
 - Possible extension of the 4 May deadline to provide comments (CITES, Chair, CMS)
 - Additional webinar needed for some participants to better understand the background document (WHC)
 - A joint conference call with the UNEP Secretariat could be useful to discuss issues related to Bern 2 (CBD). → Helpful if CBD could propose such a call, and also could help identify the UNEP document on [Guiding principles of the consultation workshop among the biodiversity-related conventions on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework](#) referred in the background document (Ramsar Convention on Wetlands).
- Another joint conference call with the Co-Chairs would be useful to discuss the updated document for the post-2020 GBF to be circulated for peer review in May (Ramsar).

Item 3. Schedule of other meetings of the conventions and possibility of ‘virtual’ formats

5. The Chair proposed a live calendar of BLG-member events on SharePoint, updated in real-time to avoid overlapping events, in light of the frequent rescheduling underway this year and next year. CBD offered to initiate gathering contents and setting up the calendar, and agreed to consult IT team and check how quickly it could be done. CBD noted other on-going exercises to develop consolidated calendars (UNEP, [EMG](#) and [IISD Reporting Services](#)) which cover calendars of some BLG members.
6. Additional comments provided regarding the impacts of COVID-19 on the implementation of activities, including lessons learnt from virtual meetings:

WHC

- Impacts on other processes of the Convention, including pending monitoring missions to the World Heritage sites where intervention is needed.
- UNESCO has experience with large virtual meetings, including a meeting with 140 ministers with interpretation. WHC offered assistance to other conventions, to share experience and information, including interpreters hire rates. WHC completed a successful 3-day meeting on climate policy for World Heritage with participation of experts and observers from all regions.

IWC

- IWC has been benefiting from working with CITES and IUCN IT/AV teams, and is ready for the Scientific Committee and Bureau meetings with simultaneous interpretation.
- The Chair proposed to provide contact names of IT/AV focal points of each convention in case of future enquiries.

CBD

- CBD organized a few expert meetings including a whole-week meeting. Observations: 1) need for flexibility to adjust time difference; 2) high data costs for virtual meeting participation in developing countries and need for data support in order to ensure their participation; 3) no participation from countries under sanction (e.g. Cuba and Syria). Technology worked well with limited hitches.
- Without additional burden, BLG members could share relevant information and documentation among the group to learn from each other.

IPPC

- Despite time difference challenges, IPPC uses tools such as Online Comment System which was proved to be useful. Time to think innovatively, come up with new ideas to improve work and prepare for long term impact.

Item 4: UNGA Summit on Biodiversity in September 2020

7. Following an introduction by CBD, the Co-Chairs of the Inter-Agency Task Force of [the UN Biodiversity Summit](#) provided updates on the preparation of the Summit followed by several questions:

- Preparation for the UN Biodiversity Summit scheduled during the high-level week of the UN General Assembly (GA) in September 2020 has started following the adoption of [UN resolution](#). Summit organized by the President of the UNGA, and UNEP and CBD are leading the preparation of substantive work. The Summit consists of opening sessions followed by plenary and two parallel leaders dialogues.
- Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) preparing concept note for the Summit. Timeline: Co-Chairs (UNEP and CBD) present the draft concept note to the Task Force for review, then to the Office of the President of the GA (OPGA) for approval and distribution to the Members States in early July.
- Overarching theme of the Summit: role of biodiversity in supporting sustainable development. Important to demonstrate importance of biodiversity and actions in the context of on-going pandemic to build back better. Major opportunity for BLG members to give political momentum to the development of post-2020 GBF and would be important to work through Parties representatives of each convention through each focal points. It would be useful to receive inputs from BLG members on key messages to be highlighted in the concept note, not for details but for a big picture with outward looking.

Questions and comments to the Co-Chairs:

- Question from ITPGRFA on expected outcome from the Summit → Formal outcome: a report to be prepared by OPGA (no resolution as such to prevent duplication of on-going work on the subject); Expected non-tangible outputs: political momentum and high-level commitments at level of heads of state and government on biodiversity in the context of SDGs and towards adoption of ambitious post-2020 GBF.
- CITES welcomes strengthening of linkages between biodiversity and sustainable development as reflected in its Strategic Vision of the Parties. Question from CITES on how the inputs are being coordinated, given that UNDP is coordinating contributions to the Summit as EMG → Concept note is the key document, to be prepared in the coming weeks.

Package of documents will be made available to the Summit (e.g. IPBES Report) to showcase how the UN and other relevant agencies could contribute to the post-2020 GBF especially in terms of implementation.

- The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands Secretariat noted that the UN resolution on the Biodiversity Summit explicitly mentions the role of biodiversity-related conventions. Questions from Ramsar Convention on Wetlands on 1) the way for biodiversity-related conventions to engage in the Summit as par mandate of the UN resolution, and 2) opportunities for the BLG members through Member States to contribute to the development of the concept note prepared by IATF → No negotiation process for the Summit by Member States including drafting of the documents. IATF seeking BLG's opinions on important elements to be reflected in the draft concept note.
 - Question from CMS on organization of the Summit including timescale, format and stakeholders involved. CMS considers this a major opportunity to leverage the importance of different biodiversity targets linked to the post-2020 GBF, and disseminate key messages in light of the impact of COVID-19 → The Summit convenes on 22 and 23 September 2020 (22ⁿ afternoon for opening and the plenary, 23^d morning for parallel sessions of the two leaders' dialogues and the closing plenary). Speakers for plenary determined by OPGA. The UN resolution raised topics for the two leaders' dialogues: 1) addressing biodiversity loss and mainstreaming biodiversity in sustainable development, and 2) mechanisms for implementation. IATF membership consists of UNEP, CBD, UNDP, UNESCO, FAO, IUCN, WWF, IPBES Secretariat, UN DESA and OPGA. Opportunities for side events to be confirmed. Draft outline of the concept note will be circulated among the members of IATF and for inputs by the BLG members. The Co-Chairs will share more information after the call including the timetable for the development of the concept note.
 - There will be also a group of communication as well as a web platform to prepare for the Summit. In addition to heads of state and government, there will be high-level representation from the private sector.
8. As for communicating biodiversity for "building back better", CMS proposed to jointly prepare a message for the UN Biodiversity Summit among the BLG members on the importance of biodiversity also linking to the COVID-19 pandemic, building on previous joint statements as well as a recently-published UN response to COVID-19 which mentions biodiversity. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and IPPC mentioned that biodiversity communication focal points are already discussing the joint messaging on Covid-19 and the group will report back the outcome to the BLG.

Annex 1: List of Participants

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Elizabeth Maruma Mrema
Neil Pratt
Jyoti Mathur-Filipp
Sandra Meehan

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

Ivonne Higuero
David Morgan

Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)

Amy Fraenkel
Laura Cerasi

International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)

Jingyuan Xia
Avetik Nersisyan
Mirko Montuori

International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)

Kent Nnadozie
Francisco López

International Whaling Commission (IWC)

Rebecca Lent
Sarah Smith
Imogen Webster

Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention on Wetlands)

Martha Rojas Urrego
María Rivera

Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage

Mechtild Rössler
Guy Debonnet
Frederique Aubert
Akane Nakamura
Michel Venne

Inter-Agency Task Force for the UN Biodiversity Summit (Resource persons for Item 4)

Jamil Ahmad – Co-Chair (UNEP)
David Cooper – Co-Chair (CBD)
Mara Angelica Murillo Correa (UNEP)
Marine Collignon (UNEP)