

Agenda Item 7.5

Further Implementation of the Agreement
(2013-2015/16)

Online Tools

Document 7-05

Online Tools

Action Requested

- Take note
- Endorse the proposals made in the document

Submitted by

Secretariat



NOTE:
IN THE INTERESTS OF ECONOMY, DELEGATES ARE KINDLY REMINDED TO BRING THEIR OWN COPIES OF DOCUMENTS TO THE MEETING

Online Tools

1. In line with the repeated request from Parties to enhance collaboration and synergies between the co-located Secretariats of the CMS Family, and thanks to voluntary contributions to CMS by Germany (€30,000 towards the development of the new CMS Family Website) and Switzerland (€13,000 towards the development of the CMS Family workspace), which made it possible to progress these projects, ASCOBANS Parties will benefit from a number of technological innovations for the CMS Family.

Online Reporting

2. In order to ease the reporting burden for Parties and streamline the process, the CMS Family has developed an Online Reporting System (ORS), a new state-of-the-art electronic platform to revolutionize reporting under Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEA). A prototype was developed in 2006-2008 in the framework of the UNEP Project “*Knowledge Management for MEAs*” sponsored by Norway. Building on this prototype, UNEP-WCMC in 2010-2011 worked in close collaboration with the AEWA Secretariat in order to develop a system fulfilling the needs of both the Parties and the Secretariat. Subsequently, AEWA was the first MEA to use the CMS Family ORS for reporting to AEWA MOP5 (May 2012). CMS is planning to use the ORS for reporting to CMS COP11 (2014) as well as other CMS instruments. Other MEAs, such as CITES, CBD and Ramsar, have expressed their interest in using this system.

3. Rather than provide a fixed template, the Online Reporting System is a versatile platform that allows easy adjustment and can be customized to fit any reporting form. After a few hours of training, Secretariat staff can design and quickly update the national reporting templates, since no programming skills are required. There are many options for customizing individual questionnaires; with different question types, dependencies, flexible re-ordering of questions and sophisticated looping questions as well as filtering options.

4. At the respondent level, the system allows for delegation of sections or 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. Using this tool will enable Parties to fulfil their reporting requirements quickly and efficiently. It will also allow Parties to review their previous reports more readily and update the information to make it relevant to the current reporting period.

5. The on-line reporting tool should streamline the process, making it more efficient for Parties and more standardized for analysis. Ultimately, if CMS and its daughter agreements all adopt the on-line reporting tool, Parties would be able to fulfil their reporting requirements for the various agreements without duplicating effort.

6. ASCOBANS could move to online reporting for the reports to be provided in March 2013, making use of the current template. In order to ease the transition for Parties, the Secretariat can offer to pre-fill the online form with information from previous reports, which would then just need to be updated.

7. While no costs are foreseen for the development of the templates, running costs of the system might be incurred by the webhosting and any assistance that may be necessary during the reporting cycle. In case these cannot be covered from the core budget, the Secretariat would undertake fundraising efforts.

8. In the medium-term and in order to benefit fully from the opportunities for synergies among CMS Family treaties afforded by this tool, Parties may wish to consider revising the

national report format to align it more closely to the format used in CMS, AEWA and EUROBATS, without losing the questions related only to ASCOBANS. A new format could be developed by a small working group assisted by the Secretariat for consideration by the Advisory Committee in preparation for the 8th Meeting of the Parties, which would be asked to endorse the new format.

9. To date, the ORS does not yet contain a specific tool for structured analysis and extraction of information supplied in the national reports. This would however be crucial in order to realize fully the potential benefits offered by an online system, and its development is planned for the future. Further resources will be needed to develop the Analytical Tool. The CMS Secretariat is making efforts to fundraise for this project (€200,000), which would benefit all MEAs making use of the ORS.

Online Meeting Registration

10. In order to improve the pre-registration process for meetings, the CMS Secretariat has developed a new [online system](#) that covers meetings being run by the CMS Secretariat and its out-posted offices as well as by Secretariats of daughter agreements.

11. The system allows the creation of individual pre-registration forms comprising sections which can be tailored to the specific requirements of each meeting. Only the section containing fields related to general information of participants e.g. name, organization, and address is fixed and common to all forms.

12. This section also includes a feature called “Remember my data” that facilitates registering to more than one meeting at the same time by enabling the system to remember the information completed in one form and transfer it to a new one.

13. The use of this system brings multiple benefits to the organization of meetings:

- The Secretariat’s workload is reduced – the system directly produces Excel lists of pre-registrations which supersede the traditional process involving paperwork and copying data from Word forms into Excel lists.
- The pre-registration process is easier – the system offers forms easy to complete (some fields have dropdown menus) and meeting participants can pre-register for CMS Family meetings from any place in the world without the need of having access to their business email accounts.
- The pre-registration process is streamlined across the CMS Family – the system offers the possibility to register for more than one CMS meeting taking place in the same period, thereby simplifying the process.

14. With endorsement of Parties, the ASCOBANS Secretariat would like to start using the online meeting registration system from the start of 2013 onwards. No costs would be incurred for ASCOBANS, as costs related to maintenance and webhosting are kindly being met by the CMS Secretariat.

15. This system might be replaced by a newer system which is being developed in the context of the new CMS Family database (see below).

Online Workspace for the Advisory Committee

16. Building on a system used by the Technical Committee of the African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) since 2009, CMS and the other co-located Agreements have developed ‘Online Workspaces’ for their technical bodies. These are electronic, web-based communication spaces and working areas, which provide central platforms for online collaboration. The restricted area includes functionalities such as discussion among members, shared editing of documents, storage of reference documents,

and member profiles. There are options for restricted access to specific working groups for external experts, thus allowing them to bring in expertise from the outside without granting full user rights. It also serves as an archive of all earlier communication within these groups.

17. For the AEWA Technical Committee, their Online Workspace is now the primary tool for progressing intersessional work and is highly appreciated by members. The Secretariat is therefore pleased to be able to offer such a platform also to the Advisory Committee and its Working Groups.

18. The initial upgrade and improvement of the AEWA Technical Committee Workspace and the development of the duplicate platforms to be used by the CMS Scientific Council, EUROBATS Advisory Committee and ASCOBANS Advisory Committee were done at no cost to the Agreement, but was financed through a voluntary contribution from Switzerland to the CMS Secretariat. Running costs of the system will be incurred by the webhosting and any upgrades that may be necessary in the future and would be shared between the CMS Family Secretariats based on percentages calculated from their total annual budgets. In case of a need for more substantial resources that cannot be covered from the core budget, the Secretariats would undertake joint fundraising efforts.

19. Using this system will markedly enhance the intersessional work of the Advisory Committee and its Working Groups and the Parties' endorsement and recommendation of its active use are requested. Following this Meeting, the Secretariat would include details of the ASCOBANS Work Plan and the Working Groups established under the Advisory Committee in the system and thus prepare it for effective use by the members already in preparation of the 20th Advisory Committee Meeting.

Online Database

20. As expressed in the Annex to CMS Resolution 10.7 on Outreach and Communication Issues, CMS Parties found that the current CMS website did not match the requirements of all Parties and users. The first issue was that CMS and other organizations belonging to the CMS Family have independent websites, which differ from the general CMS website. This hampered easy access to information made available by the Convention and impeded a joint web presence.

21. After prior consultation within the CMS Family, the CMS Secretariat offered to develop a new website portal, which could include all CMS Agreements, MOUs and out-posted offices. This new tool would enable CMS to improve information exchange among the CMS Family, increase the visibility of CMS and present the CMS Family as an entity under the larger CMS umbrella.

22. The new Website portal will respect the wish expressed by ASCOBANS Parties to maintain the Agreement's own visibility and recognition and at the same time to show that ASCOBANS is part of the CMS Family. There are considerable benefits from building a common back-end database infrastructure both for the information utilised by the Secretariats and to be presented in enhanced websites for the CMS Family. [UNEP/CMS/Inf.10.25](#) contains details relating to the key benefits expected, namely:

- a) **Enable information-sharing** between the CMS Family entities and with other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA) through InforMEA and other external data repositories; ensure greater compatibility and integration of data across the CMS Family;
- b) **Enhance accessibility** by making more content available in all CMS official languages and using more effective search tools; and
- c) Make better use of up-to-date web technologies to **increase interactivity** on the website and to include more audio-visual/multimedia content.

23. As a first step towards developing a common web-based database, a working group consisting of team members of all co-located Secretariats of the CMS Family assessed the currently available data, commonalities, differences, needs and ideas. With financial support from the government of Germany to the CMS Secretariat, a consultant firm has been hired to develop a database structure for joint use by all four Secretariats and migrate the existing data into it.

24. This work is expected to be completed by the end of 2012 and will at first be mainly for internal use by the Secretariats to streamline and enhance their work processes and collaboration. The CMS Secretariat is making efforts to fundraise for the next step of the project (€100,000) which includes the elaboration of the layout of the site and programming templates. Making use of the new web-based database and a content management system, new features can then be made available on the websites of all four treaties as time and resources allow.

Parties are requested to:

- a) Endorse the proposal to move to online reporting for the reports to be provided in March 2013, making use of the current template.
- b) Consider establishing a small working group assisted by the Secretariat to prepare a revised national reporting format for consideration by the Advisory Committee in preparation for the 8th Meeting of the Parties, and to include this as an activity in the Work Plan for the coming intersessional period.
- c) Endorse the use of an online meeting registration system for all meetings organized by the Secretariat from 2013 onwards.
- d) Endorse the use of the Online Workspace by the Advisory Committee and its Working Groups for their intersessional work.
- e) Take note of the progress made with establishing a common CMS Family database structure.
- f) Consider granting financial support to the above-mentioned activities which require additional resources.