

**5th Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the
CMS Scientific Council (ScC-SC5)**

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CONSERVATION OF THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT

(Prepared by the Secretariat)

Summary:

This document presents possible implications related to the implementation of CMS Resolution 12.19 *Endorsement of the African Elephant Action Plan* as well as the West African Elephant Memorandum of Understanding, following the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) recent recognition of *Loxodonta africana* and *Loxodonta cyclotis* as two distinct species and its revised assessment of the conservation status of these species. The Sessional Committee is invited to provide its advice.

CONSERVATION OF THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT

Background

1. African Elephants were listed on CMS Appendix II in 1979, as a single species *Loxodonta africana*. Since 2008, when the 9th meeting of the CMS Conference of the Parties (COP9) adopted Wilson & Reeder, 3rd edition (2005), as reference for taxonomic nomenclature, the Parties have recognised *Loxodonta africana* and *L. cyclotis* as two distinct species, both of which have been listed on Appendix II of the Convention.
2. The CMS Secretariat has been supporting the conservation of both species of African Elephant, with a focus on Western African Elephant populations following the development of the Memorandum of Understanding concerning Conservation Measures for the West African Populations of the African Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) (African Elephant MOU), signed by its thirteen Range States in 2005.
3. At COP12 (Manila, 2017) CMS Parties considered the African Elephant Action Plan (AEAP), which groups all African Elephants under one species *Loxodonta africana*, and which was originally agreed by all 37 African Elephant Range States in the margins of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (Doha, 2010). Through the adoption of Resolution 12.19 *Endorsement of the African Elephant Action Plan* CMS Parties recognized the AEAP as the principal strategy for the conservation of African Elephants. COP12 also requested the CMS Secretariat to become an *ex officio* member of the African Elephant Fund (AEF) Steering Committee.
4. CMS COP13 (Gandhinagar, India, 2020) adopted Decisions 13.99 to 13.100 *African Elephant Action Plan* encouraging the Signatories to the African Elephant MOU to consider replacing their Work Programme with the African Elephant Action Plan (AEAP) and to implement the MOU through the AEAP and the African Elephant Fund (AEF) structure. Subject to the availability of external resources, the CMS Secretariat is to convene a meeting of the Signatories to take a decision about the future of the African Elephant MOU. With the generous funding of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, a meeting was to take place back-to-back with a CITES MIKES meeting in 2020, but this had to be postponed due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

Review of Red List Assessment

5. On 25 March 2021, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) announced that it now recognizes *L. africana* and *L. cyclotis* as two distinct species. In addition, the IUCN African Elephant Specialist Group revised its assessment of the conservation status of African Elephants, finding that *L. cyclotis* is Critically Endangered, and *L. africana* is Endangered. Previously, the conservation status of African Elephants as a single species, *L. africana*, was assessed as Vulnerable.
6. The new assessment report shows that the number of *L. cyclotis* fell by more than 86 percent over a period of 31 years, while *L. africana* numbers decreased by at least 60 percent over the last 50 years. The report also indicates that ongoing land conversion, primarily to agricultural uses, is significantly reducing elephant habitats and that this is now a key threat to their conservation.

Discussion and analysis

7. As explained above, although CMS Parties have recognised both species of African Elephant since 2008, as reflected in CMS Appendices and the CMS website, to date, elephant conservation efforts under the Convention have focused equally on both species as both species had the same Red List status. In addition, initiatives like the AEAP and the AEF have not proposed separate support streams for the two species.

8. In light of the distinction by IUCN of the two Elephant species and, in particular, their new Red List Assessments, the Sessional Committee may wish to consider whether and how the manner in which the two species are treated within the CMS context should be adjusted. To date, the difference in the conservation needs of the species is not reflected in the AEAP and there has been no species-level prioritisation for funding under the AEF. Neither does the CMS MOU differentiate between the two species. Given the new species-level conservation assessment by IUCN from Vulnerable to Endangered (*L. africana*) and Critically Endangered (*L. cyclotis*) an intensification of conservation actions for both species seems to be warranted and may require more targeted conservation actions to address the distinct conservation threats that each species faces.

Recommended actions

9. The Sessional Committee is recommended to:
- a) Discuss the need to update the AEAP to reflect the separate species status of *L. africana* and *L. cyclotis*.
 - b) Request the CMS Secretariat to bring the matter to the attention of the AEF Steering Committee in its role as *ex officio* member.
 - c) Consider the implications of the Red List Assessment for possible conservation measures under CMS, including the implications for the Western African Elephant MOU.
 - d) Discuss the need for the intensification of conservation actions for both species including the need for habitat conservation and restoration.