

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

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**WILDLIFE DISEASES AND MIGRATORY SPECIES**

*(Prepared by the Secretariat)*

**Summary:**

This document summarizes mandates and areas of competence of the Convention in the field of wildlife diseases, and institutional and technical mechanisms that have been established to fulfill these mandates.

The Sessional Committee is invited to consider its role and contribution to the work of the Convention in this area, including through the possible reactivation of the Working Group on Migratory Species as Vectors of Diseases.

## WILDLIFE DISEASES AND MIGRATORY SPECIES

### Background

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has focused attention on wildlife diseases and the risks they pose to human health. It has also raised awareness about the linkages between the increased frequency of emerging infectious diseases in wildlife and their spillover to humans, and exploitation of wildlife and habitat destruction and fragmentation.
2. The same human activities that are causing the increasing risk of infectious diseases from animals are also major factors in the decline of wild species of animals, including migratory species. These include the direct use of wild species for purposes such as the use of meat as a source of food or income, use of animal parts for other commercial purposes, recreational hunting, and traditional healing practices; and the destruction of natural habitat and the encroachment of activities that bring humans and their livestock in close proximity to wild species, increasing the risk of spillovers of pathogens to humans.

### Existing Mechanisms of CMS to Address Wildlife Disease

3. CMS has been considering wildlife disease since COP8 in 2005, defining mandates and areas of competence of the Convention in this area through a series of COP resolutions, and developing mechanisms to deliver those mandates. These are consolidated in Resolution 12.6 on *Wildlife Disease and Migratory Species*.
4. Resolution 12.6 recognizes CMS and its Scientific Council's role in providing practical measures, recommendations and guidance on the nature and extent of risks associated with diseases and migratory species. With a view to fulfilling this role, CMS has led the establishment of a number of institutional and technical mechanisms:
  - the Scientific Task Force on Wildlife and Ecosystem Health;
  - the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds,
  - the Working Group on Migratory Species as Vectors of Diseases established within the Scientific Council.
5. The **Scientific Task Force on Wildlife and Ecosystem Health** was created in 2011 and co-convened by FAO and CMS, with the membership consisting of relevant science-based organizations, associations or experts in the field of human, wildlife, livestock and ecosystem health. The Task Force aimed to coordinate, share science-based information and raise awareness on prioritized diseases as well as biodiversity and ecosystem health concerns within the context of relevant MEAs, to support decision-making processes. This task force is currently not operational.
6. The **Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds** was established in 2005 by the CMS and AEWA Secretariats in response to concerns about the role of migratory birds as potential vectors of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) virus subtype H5N1. Since June 2007, the Task Force has been co-convened by FAO and the CMS Secretariat. The Task Force aims to bring together scientific advice on the conservation impact of the spread of avian influenza, and the role of migratory birds as vectors of the virus. It is also intended to issue advice on the root causes of the avian influenza as well as on technically sound measures to combat it and to develop early warning systems. Resolution 12.06 requests the Secretariat to ensure the continued leadership of the Convention in the Task Force and urges the Scientific Council, with and through the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds, to provide relevant input on practical measures to reduce the risk of disease transmission between wild, captive and domesticated birds, to those agencies developing contingency and wetland management plans related to HPAI.

7. The **Working Group on Migratory Species as Vectors of Diseases** was established in 2007, in the context of the CMS Scientific Council. Resolution 12.06 requests the CMS Secretariat, working with the Scientific Council and the Working Group, to make recommendations regarding the nature and extent of risks associated with other diseases in migratory species and possible areas of action to be taken by Parties in addressing this.
8. Other processes, including the One Health effort of the WHO, FAO and OIE, are broadening their scope to include a new emphasis on the intersection of wildlife and human health. Historically, the focus had been on the negative impact of wildlife on humans and domesticated animals, and not on the conservation implications of wildlife exploitation and habitat destructions. UNEP joined the One Health initiative in 2020 and is helping to steer additional attention to the impact of human activities on wildlife and nature, and the resulting risks to human health. A recent significant development in this regard has been the creation of a One Health High-Level Expert Council involving all four agencies and other key international experts on human, animal, environment and social sciences. The Council is tasked to collect, distribute and publicize reliable scientific information on the links between human, animal and environmental health in order to assist public officials make appropriate decisions to address future crises and to inform citizens. However, attention to the particular issues relevant to migratory species is needed.

#### Migration and wildlife disease dynamics

9. While some migratory species have been associated with the spread of zoonoses, migration has also been shown to reduce transmission in some species. In particular, reduction of length or suppression of migration has been associated with increased load in pathogens.
10. As pressures on migratory species and their habitats are expected to continue growing over the coming decades, including effects on migratory behaviour, there is an urgent need to further investigate links between animal migration and disease infection dynamics. Literature exists on the subject, but a recent review of scientific knowledge is currently not available. Such a review could inform the work of relevant CMS mechanisms, such as the above-mentioned Working Group on Migratory Species as Vectors of Diseases under the CMS Scientific Council and the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds. Relevant mandates in this regard to the Scientific Council and the Secretariat are contained in Resolution 12.6.

#### Discussion and Analysis

##### *Reactivation of the Working Group on Migratory Species as Vectors of Diseases*

11. The Working Group on Migratory Species as Vectors of Diseases, established within the Scientific Council, provides an appropriate mechanism to increase attention to these issues.
12. In light of the significant renewed interest on this matter, the Scientific Council might wish to consider reactivating the Working Group, with the task of developing and overseeing the elements of the Programme of Work of the Sessional Committee in relation to Wildlife Diseases. Steps in this direction might include: (i) a new call for membership of the Working Group, to be initially addressed to members of the Council and be extended as appropriate to competent partner organizations; (ii) development of Terms of Reference of the Working Group; (iii) definition of a programme of work for the intersessional period.
13. Leadership to the Working Group could be provided by the new COP-appointed Councillor for IAS/Wildlife Diseases, expected to be appointed intersessionally by the Standing Committee in consultation with the Sessional Committee.

*Undertaking a review of migration dynamics and wildlife disease.*

14. The Secretariat has been exploring with Parties and other potential donors interest in financially supporting the production of a review on migration dynamics and wildlife disease. The present meeting will provide an opportunity to the Sessional Committee of the Scientific Council to provide inputs to the Terms of Reference of this review.

Recommended actions

15. The Sessional Committee is recommended to:
- a) take note of this document;
  - b) consider existing mandates from the Conference of the Parties in relation to wildlife diseases;
  - c) provide inputs to the Terms of Reference of a review of available scientific knowledge of the links between animal migration and disease infection dynamics;
  - d) consider reactivating and renewing the mandate of the Working Group on Migratory Species as Vectors of Diseases