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**Agenda Item 6.2: Options to Streamline Reporting by
Pacific Island Countries to MEAs**

(Paper presented by Australia)



Australian Government

Department of the Environment and Water Resources

Options Paper

**Options to streamline reporting by Pacific Island
countries (PICs) to multilateral environment
agreements (MEAs)**

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Executive Summary

The Australian Government's Department of the Environment and Water Resources, in collaboration with the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), has prepared the following options paper to streamline reporting by Pacific Island countries (PICs) to multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

The paper was developed in response to the increasing burden placed on countries to report against a range of MEAs. Fulfilling reporting requirements is difficult as the process of reporting to MEAs is often onerous, duplicative and lacking in clear guidance and purpose. For nations with small environment agencies - which is the case for many PICs - reporting can be particularly difficult and resource-intensive. The primary objective of this work is therefore to minimise the duplication of reporting and to reduce the resources required for PICs to prepare and submit their MEA reports.

Options

Four options to streamline reporting by PICs to five of the biodiversity-related MEAs are presented here. The five MEAs considered are the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the World Heritage Convention (WHC); Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar).

The four options outlined in this paper are:

- **Option One:** Consolidated template for reporting against the biodiversity-related MEAs;
- **Option Two:** Tailoring State of the Environment reports to meet the requirements for biodiversity-related MEAs;

- **Option Three:** Using the proposed SPREP Country Profiles as a template to report on the biodiversity-related MEAs; and
- **Option Four:** Sub-regional reporting approach to the biodiversity-related MEAs.

Recommendation

SPREP members are invited to discuss the options at the 18th SPREP Meeting in September 2007 and to consider supporting the trial of a preferred option.

This paper recommends that further consideration be given to 'Option One: Consolidated template for reporting against the biodiversity-related MEAs' for a number of reasons. Firstly, this option will result in less duplication of reporting for PICs who are Party to more than one of the biodiversity-related MEAs. Secondly, it will be tailored specifically to meet the information requirements of PICs. Thirdly, this approach links in with the current work of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), which is exploring options for a consolidated template for reporting to the biodiversity-related MEAs. There is therefore scope to ensure that approaches to streamline and harmonise reporting are consistent at the regional and global scale.

Part One

Introduction

This paper has been developed by the Australian Government's Department of the Environment and Water Resources, in collaboration with the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), to provide options to streamline¹ reporting by Pacific Island countries (PICs) to multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

The project has been funded under the Australian Agency for International Development's (AusAID) Pacific Governance Support Program (PGSP). The PGSP funds governance activities which link Australian Government agencies directly with Pacific counterparts and which support regional governance approaches.

After outlining the issues relating to reporting to multilateral environmental agreements, the paper presents four options to streamline reporting by PICs to MEAs. The options have been prepared in consultation with SPREP and SPREP members, and are presented for consideration at the SPREP Annual Meeting in September 2007. SPREP members are invited to endorse a preferred option which will be trialled subject to the approval and provision of additional funding.

Background

This project was developed to address the increasing burden placed on countries to report against the expanding range of MEAs. The size of the reporting burden is indicated by the fact that to date '90% of [the Global Environmental Facility's (GEF)] resources have been provided for Enabling Activities' for countries to meet reporting requirements to international conventions (The World Bank, 2007, p. i).

¹ **Definition of streamlined and harmonised reporting:** In this paper, streamlined reporting refers to simplifying the process of reporting by reducing the extent or amount of reporting required. Harmonised reporting refers primarily to the process of standardising, improving compatibility and information sharing across MEAs.

Fulfilling reporting requirements is difficult for both developed and developing countries as the process of reporting to MEAs is often onerous, duplicative and lacking in clear guidance and purpose. For developing countries, particularly those with small environment agencies, reporting can be particularly difficult and resource-intensive. It can put pressure on national environment agencies in terms of staffing and resource requirements, and can often require the collation of data that is neither readily available nor relevant to the environmental situation and objectives of developing countries.

Despite this, reporting on the implementation of MEAs is important for a number of reasons. It provides information to MEA Secretariats on the activities that Parties have undertaken to meet their international environmental obligations and on national progress with the implementation of the agreement. Reporting can also assist Parties in assessing their own progress in achieving environmental outcomes and their obligations under agreements, and can aid countries in identifying successes as well as challenges and gaps in their national environmental governance.

While reporting is an important mechanism to determine how nations are progressing with meeting their international obligations, the number of reports that countries are now required to complete is extensive. This reporting burden has resulted in issues such as non-submission of reports, the submission of incomplete reports, or submission of inaccurate data due to a lack of capacity to fulfil the reporting requirements. Reducing the burden of reporting by streamlining the process could result in better rates of submission and could also allow PICs to redirect resources towards other activities in line with their national environmental priorities.

This project therefore focuses on options to streamline reporting to assist PICs with their reporting compliance and responsibilities under MEAs. It aims to complement and build upon existing work on the harmonisation of reporting that has been underway for a number of years at the international level. The options have been tailored to take into account the capacity of PICS to meet current reporting requirements. It aims to eliminate the requirement to report on information that is not of use or relevance to PICs, and to ensure that PICS are not required to report more than once on the same information.

Geographical Coverage

The paper focuses on PICs which are independent and self-governing states due to the nature of the funding agreement for this project.

The following 14 countries have therefore been included in this project:

- Cook Islands
- Fiji Islands
- Kiribati
- Marshall Islands
- Micronesia (Federated States)
- Nauru
- Niue
- Palau
- Papua New Guinea
- Samoa
- Solomon Islands
- Tonga
- Tuvalu
- Vanuatu

Part Two

Streamlining reporting to the biodiversity-related MEAs

Streamlining reporting across the broad range of MEAs is difficult as the objectives and priorities of MEAs can vary significantly from one agreement to another. There is, however, scope to focus on a group of similarly themed MEAs (i.e. a 'cluster' group) and to identify synergies and linkages within a cluster group.

The cluster group chosen for this paper includes five of the biodiversity-related MEAs. This cluster has been chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, consultation with Australian Government focal points for the biodiversity-related MEAs indicated that the reporting requirements for these MEAs are extensive, resource intensive and time consuming. Secondly, consultation with officers in SPREP identified that the conservation and protection of biodiversity is a pressing issue for many PICs and that assistance with the biodiversity-related MEAs would be beneficial. Thirdly, work is progressing under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) relating to the harmonisation of reporting to the biodiversity-related MEAs. This provides scope to build upon existing work and move towards a strategy for reporting that is appropriate in the Pacific context.

The biodiversity-related MEAs (or conventions) considered for this project are:

- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD);
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES);
- World Heritage Convention (WHC);
- Convention on Migratory Species (CMS); and
- Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar).

The reporting requirements for these conventions are linked closely to the obligations set out in the convention texts. They seek information primarily on the progress made by Parties with domestic implementation of the convention's requirements.

However, a number of commonalities (or common themes) are apparent across the five MEAs. UNEP has undertaken substantial work to identify common themes of four of the MEAs within the biodiversity-related cluster. Table One identifies these common themes. This information provides a base upon which a streamlined reporting approach could be established.

Table One: Common themes among the biodiversity-related MEAs				
Source: UNEP-DELIC & UNEP-WCMC (draft, in preparation), <i>Joint core reporting elements of biodiversity-related conventions and agreements: A report from the UNEP Knowledge Management project</i>				
Theme	CBD	CITES	Ramsar	CMS
Overview of obligations	✓			✓
National strategies, policies and programmes	✓	✓	✓	✓
Indigenous and local communities	✓		✓	
Capacity-building	✓	✓	✓	✓
Protected areas	✓			✓
Monitoring	✓	✓	✓	✓
Indicators	✓			
General in situ conservation measures	✓		✓	✓
Restoration and rehabilitation of ecosystems and threatened species	✓		✓	✓
Sustainable use	✓	✓	✓	
National finances			✓	✓
Co-operation between agreements		✓	✓	
Transboundary co-operation	✓	✓	✓	
Technical and scientific co-operation	✓			
Communication, education and public awareness	✓	✓	✓	✓
Information exchange		✓	✓	
Legislative measures		✓		✓
Research		✓		
Training			✓	
Information management		✓		

A more in-depth study of information requirements shared among the biodiversity related MEAs is provided in **Appendix One: Summary of main information for the biodiversity-related MEAs.**

Activities relating to harmonising and streamlining reporting to MEAs

Harmonising and streamlining reporting to MEAs is an issue that has been under consideration for some time by MEA Secretariats and key environment agencies and organisations.

In general, work at the MEA Secretariat level has focused on:

- General revisions to reporting formats in response to concerns from MEA Parties about the length of reports;
- Promoting coordination between MEA Secretariats to report using a common format and dataset to overcome the problem of duplication and overlap;
- Promoting online reporting to improve the ease of reporting; and
- Developing a central, online depository to assist with reporting to the biodiversity-related MEAs.

Further information on the work undertaken at the MEA Secretariat level is provided in **Appendix Two: Overview of the work at the MEA Secretariat level to improve and facilitate reporting to the biodiversity-related MEAs.**

A number of initiatives designed to address the issue of MEA reporting have been previously undertaken or are presently being undertaken by international agencies and regional bodies. Commonly, these focus on addressing the burden of reporting by harmonising reporting requirements. More information on this work is presented in **Appendix Three: Overview of projects underway to streamline and harmonise MEA reporting.**

Part Three

State of reporting against the biodiversity-related MEAs in the Pacific

All PICs included in this project are Party to at least one of the five biodiversity-related MEAs; most are Party to two or more of the MEAs. Table Two provides the total number and details of the MEAs to which PICs are Party.

Table Two: Status of ratification by PICs to the biodiversity MEAs						
PIC	CBD	CITES	CMS	Ramsar	WHC	TOTAL
Cook Islands	✓		✓			2
Fiji Islands	✓	✓		✓	✓	4
Kiribati	✓				✓	2
Marshall Islands	✓			✓	✓	3
Micronesia (Federated States)	✓				✓	2
Nauru	✓					1
Niue	✓				✓	2
Palau	✓	✓		✓	✓	4
Papua New Guinea	✓	✓		✓	✓	4
Samoa	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Solomon Islands	✓				✓	2
Tonga	✓				✓	2
Tuvalu	✓					1
Vanuatu	✓	✓			✓	3

The biodiversity-related MEAs are just one cluster group of MEAs that PICs are required to report to. Other clusters of MEAs include the climate change conventions (i.e. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), the chemical conventions (i.e. Rotterdam, Stockholm), and the marine pollution conventions. All require some level of reporting by Parties to meet the obligations of the agreements. The burden placed on PICs to provide national environmental information is therefore quite high, especially for those with small environment agencies, limited staff, and limited funding to direct towards MEA reporting.

Consultation with a number of PICs in the form of a written questionnaire and meetings with environment ministries was undertaken in May and June 2007. The PICs indicated a desire to address the issue of reporting and were keen to develop a strategy to reduce the reporting burden.

The questionnaire responses from PICs identified the following difficulties with reporting:

- Current reporting requirements for MEAs often do not address issues that relate to the capabilities or environmental concerns of PICs;
- Insufficient staff in department or ministry to undertake MEA reporting;
- Lack of available environmental data to answer all questions required in MEA reporting templates;
- Lack of funding to complete MEA reporting;
- Difficulties in coordinating the collation of data for MEA (i.e. cross-agency collation); and
- Lack of incentive and/or clear benefits from MEA reporting.

Part Four

Options to streamline reporting by PICs to the biodiversity-related MEAs

Four options have been identified that could assist PICs to streamline reporting to the biodiversity-related MEAs:

- **Option One:** Consolidated template for reporting against the biodiversity-related MEAs;
- **Option Two:** Tailoring State of the Environment reports to meet the requirements for biodiversity-related MEAs;
- **Option Three:** Using the proposed SPREP Country Profiles as a template to report on the biodiversity-related MEAs; and
- **Option Four:** Sub-regional reporting approach to the biodiversity-related MEAs.

The primary objectives of all these options are:

- to eliminate the duplication of reporting; and
- to reduce the resources required for PICs to prepare and submit their MEA reports.

Additional benefits to PICs that may result from adopting one of the options include:

- Improvements in the quality, timeliness and availability of environmental information that could assist PICs with their environmental governance;
- Increased integration of national environmental approaches and improvements in cross-agency information sharing;
- Development of linkages between MEAs and regional bodies;
- Improvements in information sharing between PICs; and
- Improvements in SPREP's knowledge of the environmental issues facing its members.

Issues for consideration

There are a number of issues that need to be addressed when considering options to streamline reporting. These are outlined below.

- **Differing time frames of reporting cycles for MEAs**

A key issue when attempting to streamline or harmonise reporting is that the reporting schedules differ for the individual MEAs. For example, with the five biodiversity-related MEAs the time frames for reporting cover one to six years. This means that negotiation with MEA Secretariats to phase in a standardised reporting time frame will have to be undertaken. An appropriate time period for reporting will also have to take into account the capacity and needs of PICs. It will be probable that the time frames for reporting will have to be disassociated from the timing of the Conferences of the Parties (CoP), which may be an issue for some MEAs as discussion and outcomes from reporting is often required at CoPs. The time frames for reporting to the five biodiversity-related MEAs and the upcoming CoPs are outlined below.

Table Three: Timeframe for next biodiversity related MEA Conferences of the Parties (CoP) and reporting timeframes

MEA	Next report due	Next CoP
CBD	2009	9 th CoP for CBD, 19-30 th May 2008, Bonn, Germany
CMS	2008	9 th CoP for CMS, 9-21 st November 2008, Rome, Italy
CITES	2008	15 th CoP for CITES, June 2010
Ramsar	2008	10 th CoP for Ramsar, 28 th October-4 th November 2008, Republic of Korea
WHC	2009	32 nd World Heritage Committee Meeting, June-July 2008

- **Fragmented responsibility and decentralised administration of biodiversity-related MEAs**

The data required to complete MEA reporting and the administration of the biodiversity MEAs is not always coordinated or centralised through the same national ministry or agency. This can be problematic if there is a lack of coordination between the administrative ministries or agencies to meet the reporting requirements. It will be important, therefore, to consider the different institutional and administrative arrangements for MEA reporting in each PIC when considering trialling a preferred option.

- **Differing types of information requirements for the biodiversity-related MEAs**

Even within a specific cluster-group such as the biodiversity-related MEAs, not all agreements require the same information or use the same data. This complicates the data gathering and consolidation process as well as the resourcing implications.

- **Not all PICs will currently be able to source the national data required for reporting**

There is a need to determine what would be the essential data required for the selected reporting option and whether the majority of PICs have the capacity to collate this data.

- **Not all PICs are Party to the same MEAs**

As not all PICs are Party to the same MEAs in the biodiversity cluster (see Table Two), the selected approach will have to accommodate those PICs who are Party to one or two of the MEAs as well as those who are Party to the full set of biodiversity-related MEAs.

- **Reporting to MEAs has an implementation focus**

Whichever option is adopted, it will still need to provide a means for MEA Secretariats to assess countries' progress in implementing their obligations under the individual agreements. Options to streamline reporting to MEAs therefore need to be acceptable to the requirements of MEA Secretariats. Should an option to streamline reporting be endorsed by SPREP members, the approval of the relevant MEA Secretariats and CoPs will need to be sought before trialling the option in the Pacific.

The four options are described in detail in the remainder of this part of the paper.

Option One: Consolidated template for reporting against the biodiversity-related MEAs

General outline

This option would establish a consolidated template for reporting against the five biodiversity-related MEAs. A consolidated template would contain information that has been determined to be of use and relevance to PICs and would incorporate components of all five biodiversity-related MEAs.

The consolidated template would contain sufficient information to meet the requirements of the individual MEA Secretariats for their assessment of countries' progress in implementing MEAs. However, its primary purpose would be to enable PICs to undertake reporting which could support their national environmental priorities and objectives.

PICs would only be required to complete the components of a consolidated template for those MEAs to which they are a Party. Only one report would be required to address all the biodiversity-related MEAs, even when a nation is Party to multiple MEAs.

Process required to establish a consolidated template for reporting against the biodiversity-related MEAs

Should this option be selected, the steps for its further development would be:

- Consult with MEA Secretariats regarding core requirements for information in a consolidated template.
- Establish commonalities among the set of biodiversity-related MEAs and determine their relevance to PICs. Preliminary work that could be used to determine components of a consolidated template has been undertaken by the UNEP and UNEP-WCMC in their report entitled 'Joint core reporting elements of biodiversity-related conventions and agreements' (UNEP-WCMC, draft, in preparation).
- Draft outline of a consolidated template in consultation with PICs, either through group workshops or individual sessions to establish national requirements.

- Ensure that the information can be easily accessed and extracted from the consolidated template for use by MEA Secretariats and other agencies who require this information.
- Identify a timetable for reporting that is agreed upon by both Parties and MEA Secretariats and that allows for a suitable review period.
- Seek agreement on the consolidated template from all PICs and MEA Secretariats.
- Select PICs to trial the consolidated template.

Components of a consolidated template

Given that the majority of PICs are Party to the CBD and that it is quite comprehensive in its requirements and covers a wide range of biodiversity aspects, a consolidated template could be based on the CBD. The consolidated template would also have to meet the requirements for the other MEAs. For example, it is likely that it would need to address species information requirements for CITES and CMS, and would also need to feature site-based information requirements to address Ramsar and WHC. There would also be a requirement for information on progress with implementation of each of the MEAs.

Suggested topics that could be reported on for a consolidated biodiversity reporting template relevant to the Pacific include:

- Habitat types;
- Status of species;
- Traditional use of ecosystems;
- Key identified threats to biodiversity;
- Trends (i.e. noted changes in biodiversity, etc);
- Impacts of changes in biodiversity on human well-being;
- Funding for biodiversity conservation and rehabilitation;
- Efforts to implement Convention requirements; and
- Site details for Ramsar and WHC.

Advantages of this option

- Eliminates duplication, cost and burden of reporting for PICs to multiple biodiversity-MEAs as only one report is required.
- Provides a report that will have multiple uses in a broader biodiversity context. For example, the information could be used to assist countries with their State of the Environment reporting.
- Provides a basis for assessing progress/gaps in national policy development and decision-making processes.
- Provides a template tailored specifically to feature information that is of relevance to PICs and takes into account capacity issues such as data availability and reporting capacity.
- May free up resources (for example, staffing and funding) which will enable countries to focus on other tasks that may be of higher priority in achieving national environmental objectives.
- Will facilitate comparability of biodiversity-related information across the Pacific as the information will be presented in a standardised format.
- Could foster coordination and cooperation between national focal points and agencies by encouraging information sharing across agencies and countries.
- Could lead to a greater submission rate for reporting which will benefit MEA Secretariats in their assessment of progress with implementation of MEAs.
- If successful, this model could be applied to other clusters of MEAs.
- May present an opportunity to streamline access to funding sources for MEA reporting.

Disadvantages of this option

- Could require significant national coordination across agencies to source the information required to feed into the consolidated template. It is likely that there would have to be a main coordination agency responsible for the overall management, coordination and completion of the consolidated template. This may be difficult for some PICs with limited resources and capacity.
- Difficulties may exist in establishing a template that is tailored to meet PICs' requirements yet still meets the needs of the MEA Secretariats.

Option Two: Tailoring State of the Environment reports to meet the requirements for biodiversity-related MEAs

General outline

This option would build upon the State of the Environment (SoE) reporting processes that many countries already have in place to facilitate reporting to MEAs. Some countries have already linked international reporting requirements into their SoE reporting processes and there is the potential to consolidate them. Linking these processes could provide a simpler and more coordinated approach to reporting and the collation of information. It may also result in more efficient use of human, technical and financial resources for PICs.

In general, SoE reports are required to report on the following topics:

- Atmosphere;
- Biodiversity;
- Coasts and oceans;
- Human settlements;
- Inland waters;
- Land and natural resources; and
- Natural and cultural heritage.

Components of the biodiversity-related elements of the SoE could be consolidated to include specific information on ecosystems and species, as well as cross-cutting issues such as international cooperation, conservation and sustainable use technologies, traditional knowledge, monitoring and evaluation, research and training, communication, education and public awareness, and financial resources.

This option could be piloted in a country that already has a SoE reporting process in place or one that is looking to commence a SoE reporting process.

PICs that already have SoE reporting processes in place include:

- Cook Islands (prepared for 1992)
- Federated States of Micronesia (prepared for 1992)
- Fiji (prepared for 1992)
- Kiribati (prepared for 1994)
- Marshall Islands (prepared for 1993)
- Palau (prepared for 1994)
- Niue (prepared for 1994)
- Samoa (prepared for 1993)
- Solomon Islands (prepared for 1992)
- Tuvalu (prepared for 1993)
- Tokelau (prepared for 1994)

Process involved in tailoring SoE reports to meet the requirements for biodiversity-related MEAs

Should this option be selected, the steps for its further development would be:

- Consult with MEA Secretariats regarding core MEA reporting requirements that could be included under the SoE reporting process.
- Draft outline of requirements to be included in SoE reporting that is agreed upon by all PICs and MEA Secretariats.
- Ensure that the information required by MEA Secretariats can be easily accessed and extracted from the SoE report.
- Establish a time frame for reporting that is agreed by MEA Secretariats and PICs. Identify a suitable review period before updating is required.
- Define linkages between SoE reporting and MEA reporting.
- Select PICs to trial the consolidated template.

Advantages of this option

- Potential to extend the existing SoE reporting processes to incorporate the reporting requirements of MEAs.
- Builds upon existing reporting structures in some PICs.
- Reduces duplication and burden of reporting for PICs to multiple biodiversity-MEAs.
- Could be used as an opportunity to enhance inter-agency communication and collaboration and could encourage communication to promote a top-down approach to managing environmental data and reporting requirements.
- Supports the production of a report that has multiple uses in a broader biodiversity context and which can be used to assess progress/gaps in national policy development and decision-making processes.
- May free up resources (for example, staffing, funding) which will enable countries to focus on other tasks that may be of higher priority in achieving national environmental objectives.
- May encourage countries to undertake more regular SoE reporting.

Disadvantages of this option

- SoE reporting is not a requirement under international obligations whereas reporting to MEAs is. Countries may be unwilling to devote considerable resources to something that is not an obligation.
- Difficulties may still exist in coordinating the collation of information across national ministries and agencies.
- There are a number of gaps between the SoE and MEA reporting processes that would need to be addressed as they are not identical processes. There are differences in data and information required for reporting to MEAs compared to that which is required in a SoE report, for example.
- For most countries, SoE reporting has not been a regular process to date. SoE reporting would need to occur on a much more regular basis if it were to provide a basis for MEA reporting.
- By making MEA reporting a component of SoE reporting, the focus would be on meeting the information needs of PICs to ensure better national governance, rather than on meeting the requirements of MEA Secretariats. It may therefore be difficult to ensure the information requirements for MEA Secretariats are fully met.

Option Three: Using the proposed SPREP Country Profiles as a template to report on the biodiversity-related MEAs

General outline

This option utilises SPREP Country Profiles as a template to report to the biodiversity-related MEAs. The SPREP Country Profiles are currently designed to enable PICs to report against the SPREP Action Plan.

By consolidating requirements for reporting to the biodiversity-related MEAs into the SPREP Country Profile template, the reporting burden could be reduced. The template for SPREP Country Profiles may, however, require adjustment to accommodate other components necessary to meet the current requirements for the five biodiversity-related MEAs. Given the alignment of some aspects of the biodiversity components of the SPREP Country Profile template with some of the information requirements for the CBD, this could be a viable option to reduce the reporting burden.

It is important to note, however, that the primary purpose for reporting under the SPREP Country Profile is to measure progress against the SPREP Action Plan. This has a broader environmental focus than the reporting requirements for the biodiversity-related MEAs.

At the 17th SPREP Meeting, members agreed to report on one component of the SPREP Country Profile per year. This means that reporting against the biodiversity-related components of the SPREP Country Profile will not occur on a regular basis. SPREP Country Profile reporting against the biodiversity-related components and on the implementation of MEAs may not fit in with the reporting deadlines of the MEA Secretariats. This may reduce the viability of this option.

Process involved for using the proposed SPREP Country Profiles as a template to report on the biodiversity-related MEAs

Should this option be selected, the steps for its further development would be:

- Consult with MEA Secretariats regarding additional information that may need to be incorporated into the SPREP Country Profile Template.
- Identify any aspects of the SPREP Country Profile Template which may require modification to meet information requirements for MEA reporting
- Undertake a process to revise the SPREP Country Profile Template where relevant.
- Ensure that the information can be easily accessed and extracted from the SPREP Country Profile for use by MEA Secretariats and other agencies who require this information.
- Identify a timetable for reporting that is agreed upon by Parties and MEA Secretariats and that allows for a suitable review period.
- Seek agreement for reporting to SPREP Country Profile Template from all PICs and MEA Secretariats.

Advantages of this option

- Consolidates two types of reporting into one, reducing the number of reports required for completion.
- Provides a means of information sharing which will have a combined benefit in documenting a country's progress under the Action Plan as well as gathering important environmental information that is relevant to meeting international requirements.
- It can be used as a means of assessing gaps and priorities in environmental governance.
- It can be used as a comparative exercise to gauge national progress with implementation of environmental activities which will be of benefit to the Pacific region in general.

Disadvantages of this option

- The current format of the SPREP Country Profile is linked primarily to reporting against the SPREP Action Plan. Revisions to the template would therefore have to be undertaken to accommodate all information requirements.
- Consolidating the template to meet formatting and information requirements of both SPREP and MEA Secretariats may be more difficult to instigate than a reporting format that is tailored specifically to meet MEA reporting objectives.
- The timeframes for the submission of the biodiversity components of the SPREP Country Profiles might not align with MEA Secretariats' requirements.

Option Four: Sub-regional reporting approach to the biodiversity-related MEAs

General outline

This option involves developing a sub-regional reporting approach that would identify sub-groupings of PICs that share commonalities in terms of size, the MEAs to which they are Party, and their capacity to report. A small range of consolidated templates would then be developed and tailored to suit the needs of these sub-groupings. This option would use a similar methodology and implementation process to that described in Option One.

Process required to establish a sub-regional reporting approach

Should this option be selected, the steps for its further development would be:

- Consult with MEA Secretariats regarding core requirements for inclusion in MEA reporting.
- Determine PIC sub-groupings through consultation.
- Determine reporting priorities for each sub-grouping then work towards customising information for each sub-grouping.
- Draft templates in consultation with sub-groupings.
- Ensure that the information required by MEA secretariats can be easily accessed and extracted from the consolidated template.
- Identify a timetable for reporting that is agreed upon by both Parties and MEA Secretariats as well as a suitable review period before updating is required.
- Seek agreement on all templates from PICs and MEA Secretariats.

Advantages of this option

- Tailored specifically to capture information that is of relevance to PICs and takes into account capacity issues such as data availability and reporting capacity.
- Eliminates duplication and burden of reporting for PICs to multiple biodiversity MEAs.
- Provides a report that will have multiple uses in a broader biodiversity context. For example, the information could be used to assist countries with their State of the Environment reporting.
- Provides a basis for assessing progress/gaps in national policy development and decision-making processes.
- Could foster coordination and cooperation between national focal points and agencies by encouraging information sharing across agencies and countries.

Disadvantages of this option

- Very resource intensive (in terms of both cost and time) and will not necessarily guarantee a more successful outcome.
- Would likely require extensive negotiation with MEA Secretariats and CoPs before it could proceed.
- Would probably involve significant coordination and consultation, both nationally across agencies and within sub-groupings of PICs, to agree on an approach.

Recommendations and next steps

SPREP members are invited to consider the advantages and disadvantages of each option and endorse the trial of a preferred option.

The paper recommends consideration be given to trialling 'Option One: Consolidated template for reporting against the biodiversity-related MEAs'. Several reasons underlie this conclusion. Firstly, this option will result in less duplication of reporting for PICs who are Party to more than one of the biodiversity-related MEAs. Secondly, it will be tailored specifically to meet the information requirements of PICs. Thirdly, this approach links in with the current work program of UNEP and UNEP-WCMC, which is exploring options for a consolidated template for reporting to the biodiversity-related MEAs. There is therefore scope to ensure that approaches to streamline and harmonise reporting are consistent at the regional and global scale.

Upon adopting a preferred option to trial in the Pacific, the next stages would involve:

- Determining the location for a trial, or 'pilot' approach. The pilot approach should be identified through workshops with national environmental agencies and national focal points of the biodiversity-related conventions. Further work will be required to set out the details of the pilot approach and coordinate it on a national scale.
- Once the details of the pilot approach have been established, this approach should be discussed with the MEA Secretariats and/or Conferences of the Parties of the biodiversity-related conventions.

Progressing these next stages depends on securing funding. Possible sources include the Pacific Governance Support Programme (PGSP) managed by Aus AID or the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Other avenues for funding should also be explored, such as the Asian Development Bank, UNEP and the World Bank.

Possible Future Work

It is important that in conjunction with any pilot approach to streamline and harmonise reporting there is ongoing investment in improving capacity at the national level for environmental data collation, data management and data transfer.

Ensuring appropriate management of databases and data flows is important to assist with implementation and reporting to MEAs. It also supports the achievement of other national reporting requirements and improvement of domestic governance.

The development of an information infrastructure that can be shared and built upon (i.e. an agreed set of data interchange formats, such as communications protocols as well as regional databases) could assist PICs to strengthen their capacity to meet reporting requirements and in monitoring the state of the environment. Projects such as PRISM (the Pacific Regional Information System under the Secretariat of the Pacific Community), which involve the establishment of a centralised database designed to hold socio-economic and environmental data for PICs, should be supported.

References

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UNEP-WCMC (1998) *Feasibility Study for a Harmonised Information Management Infrastructure for Biodiversity-related Treaties*, accessed 2nd July 2007, http://www.unep-wcmc.org/convent/treaties_2.htm

Appendix One: Summary of main information for the biodiversity-related MEAs

Summary of main information requirements for the biodiversity-related MEAs					
Source: UNEP-WCMC (1998) <i>Feasibility Study for a Harmonised Information Management Infrastructure for Biodiversity-related Treaties</i>					
Information	CBD	CITES	CMS	Ramsar	WHC
ECOSYSTEMS					
Ecosystems and habitats					
ecosystems	✓				
habitat types	✓			✓	✓
traditional use	✓				
SPECIES		#1	#2	#3	#4
Classification, names and identification					
higher taxonomy	✓	✓	✓	✓	
scientific name	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
common names	✓	✓	✓	✓	
identification materials		✓	✓	✓	
Status					
conservation status	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
protection status (national and international)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ecology					
range and distribution	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
population data (size and trends)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
habitat requirements/availability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
migration routes	✓		✓	✓	
<i>In situ</i> and management activities					
legislation	✓	✓	✓		
<i>in situ</i> conservation and management activities	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Threats					
threats (direct, habitat destruction, indirect, etc)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
illegal trade		✓	✓		
invasive/exotic species	✓		✓		
Use					
use of species (medicinal, agricultural, economic etc)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
traditional knowledge	✓	✓	✓		
sustainable use (including levels and effect of trade)	✓	✓		✓	
number, quantity and type of specimens being traded		✓			
source/destination of specimens and permits details		✓			

Summary of main information requirements for the biodiversity-related MEAs

Source: UNEP-WCMC (1998) *Feasibility Study for a Harmonised Information Management Infrastructure for Biodiversity-related Treaties*

Information	CBD	CITES	CMS	Ramsar	WHC
trade in wetland products				✓	
waterfowl hunting statistics			✓	✓	
GENES					
Genes and genomes					
social, scientific or economic importance	✓				
legislative, administrative and policy measures	✓				
SITES		#5		#6	#7
Site details					
geographic location	✓	✓		✓	✓
site description	✓			✓	✓
boundaries and map				✓	✓
Ecology of site					
physical features	✓			✓	✓
<i>In situ</i> and management activities					
legislation	✓			✓	✓
conservation measures and management of site	✓			✓	✓
Threats					
threats	✓			✓	✓
Use					
land use	✓			✓	
hydrological values				✓	
social and cultural values	✓			✓	✓
land tenure/ownership	✓			✓	✓
economic value	✓			✓	
role of site to local communities	✓			✓	✓

Key:

- #1 fauna and flora listed in the Appendices of CITES
- #2 migratory species listed in Appendices of CMS
- #3 waterfowl and waders and any threatened/notable species of fauna or flora that occur on Ramsar sites
- #4 any threatened/notable species of fauna and flora that occur on World Heritage sites
- #5 protected sites for certain species (eg. Tiger)
- #6 Internationally important wetlands
- #7 sites of cultural or natural importance

Appendix Two: Overview of the work at the MEA Secretariat level to improve and facilitate reporting to the biodiversity-related MEAs

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

National Reports under the CBD are due every four years; the Fourth National Report to the CBD is due in 2009. The format for this report has been revised to incorporate a more practical approach to reporting. This approach has moved away from a multiple choice format to a more text-based format, which appears to be preferred by many Parties. After some criticism over the length of the past template for reporting, it has been significantly shortened.

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

Parties to CITES are required to submit two types of reports - an annual report, and a biennial report.

Annual Reporting - The annual report contains quantitative information on the trade in species listed under CITES, as well as a summary of information on, inter alia, the number and type of permits and certificates granted, the States with which such trade occurred, the quantities and types of specimens, and the names of species as included in Appendices I, II and III. Trade with a Party which fails to continuously submit annual reports without an adequate justification can be suspended. This type of reporting is integral to the success of CITES and would be difficult to simplify as the reporting is linked to trade sanctions.

Biennial Reporting - The second type of reporting under CITES is biennial reporting, under which Parties to the Convention are required to report on the legislative, regulatory and administrative measures taken to enforce the Convention. Feedback on the format of the biennial report is currently being sought by the CITES Secretariat as some Parties have indicated that a reduction in the length of this type of reporting would be welcome. There appears to be more scope to adapt the requirements of CITES biennial reporting into a streamlined reporting framework because of the types of information required in the reports.

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

Reporting under the Ramsar Convention is required every three years. The format for reporting under the Ramsar Convention is linked closely to the Convention's Strategic Plan. A sub-committee comprised of a number of Ramsar Parties is currently reviewing the format for reporting in the lead up to the next submission of national reports in 2008.

Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)

The timing for reporting on the CMS follows the schedule of the Conference of the Parties, which takes place every two to three years. The reporting template for the CMS has been recently revised but it is yet to be formally adopted. The format for CMS can be completed electronically and is customised for each Party (UNEP-WCMC, 2007).

World Heritage Convention (WHC)

Regional reporting is required under the WHC every five to six years. The World Heritage Convention Committee (the decision-making body for the WHC) is currently undertaking a review of the WHC reporting format in an attempt to improve the reporting process and to allow for better data collection for analytical purposes. The review of the current format is currently underway. There has also been some consideration of whether the reporting process for WHC can feed into other processes such as the National Capacity Self Assessment (NCSAs) programme funded under the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plan (NBSAPs) which are required under the CBD. Results from the review are pending.

Appendix Three: Overview of projects underway to streamline and harmonise MEA reporting

UNEP-WCMC – Harmonisation of National Reporting to the Biodiversity-related Treaties

The United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) has been working to harmonise the MEA reporting process for a number of years under a project entitled the 'Harmonisation of National Reporting to the Biodiversity-related Treaties'. This project focuses on drawing out synergies and linkages between the biodiversity-related MEAs to facilitate reporting.

The work undertaken to date is quite comprehensive. A key achievement was the completion of four Pilot Projects carried out in Ghana, Indonesia, Panama and Seychelles which tested different approaches to streamline and harmonise MEA reporting. These approaches included the use of a modular reporting style, a consolidated template for reporting, and state of the environment reporting to meet reporting requirements for MEAs. A review of these Pilot Projects was undertaken in 2004. Further Pilot Projects to trial approaches in the future may be launched.

UNEP-WCMC is also considering whether the draft model to harmonise reporting for the human rights treaty system could be applied to the biodiversity-related cluster. This model involves the development of a core report that meets the requirements of a group of biodiversity-related MEAs, supplemented by information specific to the implementation of each MEA (UNEP-WCMC, 2007). Currently, UNEP-WCMC is in the process of identifying the core joint reporting elements for the biodiversity-related MEAs.

Consultation between UNEP-WCMC and the Australian Government is continuing to draw out similarities between the PGSP project and the UNEP-WCMC work program and to ensure the approaches are complementary.

European Community

The European Environment Agency (EEA) has undertaken work to streamline reporting to MEAs to which the European Community (EC) is a Party. The work also explores the effectiveness of reporting on environmental measures and has included the development of summary charts of reporting obligations for the EC. One of the outcomes of this work is a web-based Reporting Obligations Database (ROD) which supports countries with their individual environment reporting. This is part of a broader program of work under the European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET).

Substantial material is available on the internet regarding analysis of the reporting obligations, as well as the design of systems to assist EC countries to access reporting information. It is unclear if this work has now extended to developing approaches to actually reduce the volume of reporting required. Although the study is focused on the EC it provides a useful overview of the problem and suggestions for addressing the issue which may be applicable to the Pacific.

Inter-Linkages

The Inter-linkages study undertaken by the United Nations University (UNU) in collaboration with SPREP was targeted towards improving coordination between the various MEAs at the national level and used case-studies from the Pacific to identify MEA synergies. Part of this work included the production of a handbook to assist PICs with the implementation of the chemical and hazardous waste MEA cluster. No further work appears to be underway at this stage on this program.

Biodiversity Liaison Group

The Biodiversity Liaison Group was established by the Secretariats of the five biodiversity-related MEAs to consider synergies and linkages among these conventions. This group holds regular meetings and is working towards establishing a more coordinated approach to exchange information across these MEAs.

2010 Biodiversity Target

The 2010 Biodiversity Target was established in 2002 by Parties to the CBD. The aim is to reduce the current rate of biodiversity loss. This target has been endorsed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the United Nations General Assembly. It has also been incorporated within the Millennium Development Goals.

The 2010 Biodiversity Indicators Partnership (2010BIP) has been established to progress work towards this target and is coordinated by UNEP-WCMC. 2010BIP is currently developing a range of biodiversity indicators which will be applied to ensure a more comprehensive and consistent process for monitoring and assessing global biodiversity.