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*The Pacific environment, sustaining our livelihoods and natural heritage in harmony with our cultures.*

## Twenty Sixth SPREP Meeting of Officials

Apia, Samoa  
22<sup>nd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> September 2015

### **Agenda Item 10.1.4: Biodiversity Related Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs)**

#### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this paper is to update Members on SPREP's role in maximising the implementation and effectiveness of biodiversity related multilateral environment agreements (MEAs) with SPREP Members.

#### **Background**

2. SPREP support to Pacific Island members includes an important role in supporting implementation of international biodiversity-focused MEAs: Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), Ramsar Convention (Ramsar) on Wetlands, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). This support was made an integral part of the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan within Strategic Priority 2.4.2: Biodiversity and Ecosystem Management. Although a primary focus of the strategic goal relates to assisting Members to implement the CBD and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, a number of targets focus on support for Ramsar, CMS and CITES.

3. SPREP has used its regional coordinating and capacity building role to assist Pacific Island states to implement and meet their obligations under multiple MEA conventions, bringing a valuable economy of scale to how these efforts are implemented across the region. This approach has, in fact, been viewed as a model for other regions of the world, and has included regional and national activities that help Members to address their sustainable development targets, Aichi biodiversity targets, developing, implementing and reporting of NBSAPs, Ramsar wetlands Action Plans, species action plans and much more. Convention secretariats continue to provide limited but important funding to support regional workshops and capacity building activities, in some cases, through MoUs, such as with the CBD, CITES and Ramsar. SPREP also provides technical support to Pacific island Members at every CBD CoP as an ongoing commitment.

4. A key component of SPREP support has been the convening of regional pre-CoP meetings to bring together Pacific island State Parties to review CoP agendas and issues, and to develop common approaches under a collective 'Pacific Voyage' campaign. A milestone was achieved in 2014 in bringing together for the first time Members and Secretariats of the CBD, CMS, Ramsar and CITES at a workshop in Nadi. The main purpose of the workshop was to coordinate and discuss common positions on priority issues for the Pacific, in preparation for conferences of the Parties to the CBD, CMS and Ramsar, with input from the CITES post-COP 16 as well as guidance from UNEP. SPREP was highly commended and recognised by partners on this significant event, which was a global achievement. A significant outcome of the combined pre-CoP meet was support to Fiji that resulted in Fiji submitting a proposal to CMS CoP 11 in Ecuador in 2014 to list 10 species of mobulid rays on Appendix I. This was the first time that a Pacific island country had championed any listing proposal for CMS, and its success was a reflection of the careful preparation that had been possible through the Nadi workshop.

5. At the World Parks Congress held in Sydney in November 2014, the SPREP Director-General signed an MoU with the Secretary-General of CITES committing the two Secretariats to a closer working relationship. This resulted directly in a very successful workshop held in Suva in June 2015 to develop a road map for the improved implementation of CITES in the region. The MoU with the CBD was also renewed at the WPC.

6. Despite these and several other successes and the strong support of Pacific delegations, MEA secretariats have been unable to provide continued adequate funding for convention officers based at SPREP specifically for the CMS and Ramsar Conventions. For the past decade the Secretariat has had a cooperative relationship with the Ramsar Secretariat, which provided funding to enable SPREP to employ an officer (since 2010 titled the Ramsar Oceania Officer). Similarly, between 2012-2014 the CMS Secretariat provided funds for SPREP to employ a CMS Pacific Officer position. Both positions required substantial additional financial support from SPREP to support operational and staff costs. Unfortunately, CMS was unable to sustain the funding arrangement beyond 2014. Similarly, although SPREP at the request of the Ramsar Secretariat engaged in a recruitment process for the Ramsar Oceania Officer at the end of 2014, the Ramsar Secretariat subsequently advised in early 2015 that it was freezing the position pending a review of funding and the recruitment process was suspended. SPREP and the CITES Secretariat have had dialogue for a number of years on the advantages of establishing a CITES Pacific Officer position at SPREP but no funding has been made available.

## **Discussion**

7. It is important that SPREP and the MEA secretariats ensure that momentum is maintained to support PIC implementation of biodiversity MEAs in the region. Targets that relate to MEA support and implementation will continue to be an integral part of SPREP's strategic plans. However, the modality for achieving these targets needs to be revisited. SPREP should continue to provide policy and technical advice, and capacity building, to Members for implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which is the foundation MEA that supports SPREP's biodiversity programme. The other MEAs (CMS, CITES, Ramsar) are also critical to SPREP's role in the region, and the placement of specific convention technical officers at SPREP has been beneficial to supporting the work of the conventions and achievement of SPREP strategic plan targets relating to Ramsar and CMS. Conversely, overall, the Strategic Plan targets relating to implementation of CITES remain problematic, which can be attributed to lack of sustained support from the convention.

8. Clearly, the model of combining SPREP policy and technical support, particularly in the case of the CBD, with financial and technical support from convention secretariats, has worked relatively well. This is particularly the case in the technically demanding site-based (Ramsar) and species (CMS) conventions where SPREP and the conventions have collaborated to employ technical specialists within the region. However, while the latter model has worked it is subject to provision of adequate funding and it has placed increasing demands on SPREP programme funding. As noted, in the case of CMS the position only lasted for three years and the Ramsar position is now under review by the Ramsar Secretariat. SPREP policy and technical capacity is highly recognized by the CBD as reflected in the way the current MOU has been designed with SPREP taking a more leading role in delivering on CBD activities in the region with the support of CBD. The SPREP Secretariat proposes, while continuing to support Member implementation of all biodiversity conventions through its programme staff, that convention secretariats will be encouraged to provide Regional Officers but at their cost and subject to their recruitment and management policies. This is consistent with the approach of other agencies based at SPREP, including UNEP and WMO. This will also avoid issues that have arisen, for example, where SPREP staffing and salary conditions exceed those of the convention secretariats, eventually widening the gap between funding provided to SPREP and actual costs.

9. Targets relating to achievement of biodiversity MEA objectives in the next strategic plan will also have to be realistic, defined in consultation with Members and convention secretariats to ensure that they are achievable with available and planned resources and aligned to the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, NBSAPs and the Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas.

#### **Recommendation**

10. Members are invited to:

- **note** that the Secretariat plays an important regional role in leveraging the implementation and effectiveness of MEAs, and achieved a number of particular advances in 2014 to improve collaborations between Members and the relevant MEAs;
- **agree** that while the Secretariat should continue to collaborate closely with the main biodiversity related MEAs, and should offer to host Regional Officers to support such collaborations, such arrangements can only be entered into if adequate funding is provided.
- **endorse** the inclusion of realistic and achievable MEA targets in the new Strategic Plan.