UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Meeting of the Bureau of the International Co-ordinating Council (ICC) of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme

UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, Room VIII (FONTENOY Building)
27-29 March 2017

Item 8 of Provisional Agenda: Update on Status of Implementation of the Exit Strategy

1. In May 2013, the MAB International Co-ordinating Council adopted the exit strategy. The purpose of the exit strategy is to improve the credibility and the quality of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and to help Member States to set the required standards for their biosphere reserve to become fully functional and to conform to the criteria according to the Statutory Framework for Biosphere Reserves and the Pamplona recommendations for transboundary sites. The exit strategy concerned 270 sites in 75 countries, including 4 transboundary sites. Five withdrawals of sites by two countries (UK and Austria) took place since the adoption of the exit strategy.

2. The Secretariat implemented all the three steps of the exit strategy by sending the first letters in October 2013 for the sites, which never submitted a periodic review nor replied to the recommendation received by the MAB ICC, excluding the sites that provided reports or follow-up at the 2013 MAB Council session. It also sent the letters to the sites which needed to send a report by 30 September 2015 to demonstrate that the site meets the criteria. Several reminders were sent, including the seven final reminders letters sent by the Chair of the MAB International Co-ordinating Council in November 2014 as described in Step 3 for sites concerned.

3. At its 28th session in Lima, Peru, in March 2016, the MAB Council agreed that countries and sites which submitted their reports in 2015 and for which the recommendations indicate that they are still not meeting the criteria would have until 30 September 2016 at the latest to address and reply to recommendations made by the MAB Council at this session. The MAB Bureau at its meeting in September 2016 further requested the Secretariat to be in contact with the Member States concerned to ensure that information be provided for the Advisory Committee examination.

4. Therefore, the Advisory Committee examined any additional information received, as well as reports and additional follow-up information at its last meeting, which took place in Paris from 23 to 26 January 2017.

5. The MAB Secretariat has compiled synthesis of information received for all sites concerned by the exit strategy and presents this data in a table with results provided region by region. To facilitate the discussions of the MAB Council in plenary and based on previous practices of the MAB Council during examination of periodic review and follow-up recommendations, a color code is used. The color code is as follows: green color for sites that do meet the criteria; red color for sites that do not meet the criteria; blue color for sites that need to send additional information; white color for sites which did not send any report, pink color for sites that self-withdrawn or are recommended to withdraw from the WNBR.
6. This color table is annexed to this document for review by the Bureau. In the comments column, further information is provided for sites which did not reply and/or requested a delay to submit the report (white color), for sites for which the recommendations indicates that it does not meet the criteria (red color), for sites which were asked to provide further information by 15 May 2017 (blue color). There are 21 recommendations that consider that the site should be withdrawn (including 5 self-withdrawal from Austria, UK already considered by the MAB Council and three sites from the USA which sent a letter indicating that they wish to withdraw from the WNBR last September 2016). The comments column refers to the seven criteria of article 4 of the Statutory Framework (see evaluation grid in Annex 2).

7. The overall response rate has been high: 96 % of the countries replied (only 3 countries did not send any response). Out of the 270 sites concerned, 46, 66 % are meeting the criteria. The analysis made show that the main reasons for not meeting the criteria are because of zonation (criteria 5) and governance (criteria 6) issues. Several sites are not meeting the criteria because of a combination of several criteria not operational. In addition to the color table, some global and regional statistics will be presented at the Bureau meeting in a form of a power point.

8. The exit strategy has generated several encouraging results, leading to large number of biosphere reserves improving the zonation, governance and management aspects. 22 sites have been extended and/or renamed since the implementation of the exit strategy. Three national workshops were held to discuss the periodic review process and reporting in concerned countries (Bulgaria, USA, Russian Federation) as direct action to the implementation of the exit strategy as well as one capacity building workshop (Democratic Republic of Congo). Several technical missions at the request of Members States were held with support from the UNESCO MAB Secretariat and Field Offices (Algeria, Bulgaria, Cameroun, Congo, Gabon, Greece, Russian Federation, Serbia, Tunisia, USA). Other technical missions are scheduled before the next MAB Council (Guinea, Rwanda).

9. The Bureau requested the Secretariat to present some reflection on how the World Network of Biosphere Reserves could support the sites that are not meeting the criteria or have difficulties in reporting the results of their review process. Some preliminary suggestions are presented below, that would need to be further discussed:

a) Organizing specific technical workshops targeting the difficulties such as zonation and governance. Host countries should cover the costs of such workshops. Such workshops could also be systematically be organized and facilitated at the regional networks meetings (such as the EuroMAB Network with a support desk workshop being organized for new biosphere reserve proposals and periodic review reports);
b) Encouraging eligible UNESCO National Commissions and MAB national Committees to apply for financial support through the UNESCO Participation Programme;
c) Requesting existing UNESCO Chairs and Centers (such as ERAIFT, the MAB Chair in France, in Spain) to provide courses and training facilities to requesting sites and countries;
d) Mobilizing the existing expertise and human resources for technical and support missions, including inviting experts of the International Advisory Committee (active and from previous mandate), other biosphere reserves staff, the UNESCO Secretariat and UNESCO field Offices; whenever possible the costs of travel and lodging should be supported by the host countries, with support from UNESCO, and no fees should be provided as per common practice in the MAB Programme;
e) Using the operational guidelines (in process) to share typical issues faced by biosphere reserves and solutions, using the diversity of the WNBR;
f) Using peer periodic review support. A biosphere reserve that meets the criteria can support and guide a site that is having difficulties to undertake the periodic review report and meeting the criteria. This peer process should be done on a voluntary basis.
g) Member States could be invited to contribute to donate on the MAB Fund to support some of the activities mentioned above, in order for the World Network to be used as a powerful
tool for enhancing the credibility and quality of its sites and for demonstrating cooperation and solidarity in action.

10. **The MAB Bureau is invited to comment on the updated information provided by the Secretariat and to provide guidance on the finalization and presentation of the document for examination by the MAB Council at its 29th session in 2017, including with the list of countries and sites which do not meet the criteria after the 30 months’ implementation period of the exit strategy.**
Annex 2: Evaluation Grid Article 4