

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

International Co-ordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme
Twenty-sixth Session

Jönköping, East Vättern Landscape Biosphere Reserve, Sweden
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ITEM 11 OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA: UPDATE ON THE EXIT STRATEGY

1. 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 with the criteria according to the Statutory Framework for Biosphere Reserves. As regards the exit strategy, 266 sites are concerned in 76 countries.

2. As a follow-up to the adoption of the exit strategy at its last session in May 2013, the Secretariat implemented Step 1 of the exit strategy for the sites which never submitted a periodic review nor replied to the recommendation received by the MAB ICC (Category A):

- The Secretariat sent 41 letters to 41 countries for sites which have never submitted a periodic review report and 14 letters concerning 14 countries for sites which never replied to the recommendation. 104 replies (82%) from 30 countries were received for sites which never submitted periodic review reports. The replies included 54 periodic review reports but also countries indicating that they will send the report within the year (5 countries).
- The Secretariat also sent 43 letters for 43 countries that need to send a report by the end of 2015 to demonstrate that the site meets the criteria (Category B).

3. The Secretariat has also implemented step 2 of the Exit strategy for the countries who did not reply to the letters sent as step 1 for Category A.

- The Secretariat has sent 17 letters as the first reminder for the countries who did not reply under Category A.

4. In total, as to date, 467 periodic review reports have been received by the MAB Secretariat and a total of 456 reports were examined by the Advisory Committee. 13 countries have never submitted a periodic review report for any of their 36 sites. The Secretariat has received an additional 11 periodic review reports as a direct reply to the exit strategy after the twentieth session of the Advisory committee was held last March. 43 out of 88 periodic review reports that have been received and were examined by the Advisory Committee at its last twentieth session were reports sent as replies to the exit strategy letters sent by the MAB Secretariat.

5. At its last session, the Advisory Committee made efforts that each recommendation state clearly if the site is or is not meeting the criteria of the Statutory Framework. At its twentieth session, the percentage of recommendations issued by the Advisory Committee that stated that the site is meeting the criteria is 43.2% for periodic review and 53.7% for the follow-up of recommendation. In total, out of the 88 periodic review reports examined, 38 are meeting the criteria. As regards the sites that are not meeting the criteria, the Advisory Committee made effort to say clearly why they do not meet the criteria in the recommendations.

6. In total, out of the 368 periodic review reports received and examined by the MAB ICC, 42.6% of the sites are meeting the criteria according to the recommendation.

7. Several Member states have requested support from the MAB Secretariat, UNESCO Offices and regional Networks to assist them in the periodic review process and any advice from the MAB ICC on how to efficiently support the requested countries would be appreciated.

8. The MAB Council is invited to comment on the progress made as regards the implementation of the exit strategy and provide guidance on future implementation.

Exit strategy

56. The representative of the Secretariat introduced document SC-12/CONF.224/7. She indicated that 287 biosphere reserves had submitted a periodic review report so far. Out of these 287 biosphere reserves, 78 biosphere reserves are due to undertake a second or third periodic review. There are 112 biosphere reserves that have never done a periodic review. She further specified that nine countries have never done any periodic review for any of their biosphere reserves (concerning 60 biosphere reserves).

57. She informed the Council that to date, 357 periodic review reports had been submitted within the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. 219 biosphere reserves had submitted one report, 65 biosphere reserves submitted two reports and three biosphere reserves submitted three reports. She explained that out of 287 biosphere reserves that have done a periodic review, 6 biosphere reserves are fully meeting the criteria and are considered as model to be shared within the WNBR. 80 biosphere reserves are meeting the criteria, 138 are partly meeting the criteria, 55 biosphere reserves are not meeting the criteria and for six biosphere reserves withdrawal was recommended.

58. She informed the Council that 102 letters were sent out in October 2012 to request the periodic review reports as well as follow-up information to the recommendations issued by the MAB Council.

59. These 102 letters requested 256 biosphere reserves in 73 countries to submit a periodic review report. Following the letters, 34 biosphere reserves submitted a periodic review report. She also indicated that 21 additional reports were received. In total, 55 periodic review reports were received by the Secretariat and were examined by the Advisory Committee in 2013.

60. 119 biosphere reserves provided answers and information on when they plan to deliver a periodic review report. 99 biosphere reserves did not answer to the letters sent out in October 2012. In addition she stated that four biosphere reserves sent a periodic review after the deadline and these will be examined by the Advisory Committee at its next meeting in 2014.

61. The letters for the follow-up of the recommendation concerned 60 biosphere reserves in 28 countries. 26 biosphere reserves provided information on the implementation of the recommendations. Five spontaneous follow-up responses were received in addition. 32 biosphere reserves did not answer to the letters sent out in October 2012. She also informed delegates that some follow-up information were received after the deadline for one site and that one biosphere reserve sent a full periodic review report as a follow-up. She indicated that a total of 31 follow-up responses had been received before the deadline so that they could be examined by the Advisory Committee in 2013.

62. After this presentation, she introduced the exit strategy proposed by the Advisory Committee.

63. After the introduction by the Secretariat, numerous delegates commended the Advisory Committee for the proposed exit strategy and the Secretariat for its comprehensive and detailed presentation. Delegates underlined that the WNBR should remain a network of excellence. Several delegates expressed disappointment about the lack of response from countries and sites. While the majority of delegates supported the exit strategy, discussion focused on (a) recipients of letters so as to ensure an improved response rate including by writing directly to Permanent Delegations and concerned ministries; (b) the number of years to be allocated to sites which do not meet the criteria; (c) the need for sites to receive adequate support from the Secretariat as well as from UNESCO field offices and MAB regional networks; (d) the need to remain flexible as regards the capacity of sites to upgrade so as to meet the criteria; (e) the need to ensure a good cultural and ecosystem representativity of the WNBR; (f) to need to have sufficient time to reach out to local communities including into languages that are not working languages of UNESCO. In addition two Observers referred to training support available for

countries for conducting the periodic review process (i.e. manual guide for managers of biosphere reserves supported by Germany and a training course for practitioners at the University of Goteborg, Sweden).

64. In her response the representative of the Secretariat confirmed that the models of good periodic review reports from all regions would be made available on the Internet after agreement by concerned countries. She also confirmed that a site that has withdrawn from the WNBR could resubmit a proposal in the future. She warmly thanked the French and Spanish MAB national Committees for their support in translating the new nomination and periodic review forms and indicated that the transboundary forms for nomination and periodic review should be online very shortly.

65. In the light of the above discussion, the Council decided to adopt an “exit strategy” as indicated below:

- (a) A biosphere reserve of the MAB Programme is an attractive designation that not only serves to enhance conservation but also sustainable development and research throughout the world. As a consequence, the number of biosphere reserves has increased considerably from 391 sites in 94 countries in the year 2000 to 621 biosphere reserves in 117 countries (including 12 transboundary sites) in 2013. The MAB Programme as a scientific programme has also evolved since its inception in 1971, and so have methods, competencies, experience, and knowledge developed on how to apply the biosphere reserve concept in practice. In this context the MAB Programme has started a process to ensure the continued adherence of the sites established as biosphere reserves to the objectives of their establishment and to ensure the credibility and coherence of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and to meet Targets 9 and 10 of the Madrid Action Plan.
- (b) Therefore, the Council decided on a *three step process* to manage the periodic review process as a tool to assess, monitor and improve the quality of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves:

1st step: The MAB Secretariat sends a letter to the relevant MAB National Committees with a copy to the individual biosphere reserve concerned, the UNESCO National Commission and the Permanent Delegation requesting submission of periodic review reports for those sites that have not yet submitted a periodic review report. In a similar manner, the MAB Secretariat sends a letter with regard to those sites which have not yet submitted information on the actions taken as recommended by the MAB-ICC on periodic review reports submitted earlier;

2nd step: If no periodic review reports or comprehensive reports on the implementation of the recommendations are received after three months, the MAB Secretariat sends a reminder letter to the relevant MAB National Committees with a copy to individual biosphere reserves, the UNESCO National Commission and the Permanent Delegation of the country concerned stating the consequences of non-action. If appropriate, the MAB Secretariat sends the reminder letter directly to the Permanent Delegation and Ministry concerned;

3rd step: If a reply has still not been received after an additional period of three months by the MAB Secretariat, the Secretariat will recommend to the MAB-ICC Bureau that its Chair should issue a last “warning” to the MAB National Committee and the biosphere reserve concerned with copies to the UNESCO National Commission, concerned ministries and the Permanent Delegation of the country concerned consisting of a request for an official statement whether the biosphere reserve wishes to remain in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and if so, accompanied with a clear statement which actions, including timeframe, will be taken.

- (c) In case a reply is still not received from the MAB National Committee or the UNESCO National Commission concerned within a further period of three months, the MAB-ICC Bureau shall recommend to the MAB ICC that the biosphere reserve in question be withdrawn from the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The MAB-ICC may then decide to remove the site from the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.
- (d) In case a reply is received from the MAB National Committee or the UNESCO National Commission, the MAB Secretariat puts the biosphere reserve concerned on an internal pending list of “Biosphere Reserves which do not fulfill the criteria” and provides a new deadline of one year for the submission of a periodic review report, and/or additional information.
- (e) If the respective national authorities wish to retain the site as a member of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves but if the site is not fulfilling the criteria of the Seville Strategy for Biosphere Reserves and its Statutory Framework, or if the site only partially fulfils the criteria, the MAB Secretariat, UNESCO field offices and MAB regional networks should offer guidance and help (e.g. by providing examples of “model periodic review reports” on the MAB website).
- (f) One year after a site has been put on the list mentioned in paragraph (d) above and then every year, the MAB Secretariat should identify and reward the willingness of biosphere reserves to comply with the criteria of the Seville Strategy and the Statutory Framework so that the biosphere reserves concerned will be removed from this list.
- (g) In case a biosphere reserve is not able to fully comply with the criteria within a period of thirty months since the periodic review process was started (i.e. first step – first demand of periodic review report), the MAB-ICC should consider that the area will then no longer be referred to as a biosphere reserve which is part of the Network (as per Article 9, para 6 of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves).
- (h) For the sites that have provided periodic review reports and/or follow up information on the recommendation on the report by the MAB-ICC prior to this exit strategy and that are not meeting the criteria, the Secretariat sends a letter to the relevant MAB National Committees with a copy to the individual biosphere reserve concerned, the UNESCO National Commission and the Permanent Delegation, indicating that a report must be submitted by the end of 2015 clearly indicating how the site is fulfilling the criteria. In case, the site is still not meeting the criteria after examination of the report by the Advisory Committee, the Bureau shall recommend to the MAB-ICC that the biosphere reserve in question be withdrawn from the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The MAB-ICC may then decide that the area will then no longer be referred to as a biosphere reserve which is part of the Network (as per Article 9, para 6 of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves).
- (i) The Council also recommends that the MAB Secretariat, UNESCO field offices and MAB regional networks provide guidance such as additional information on training for biosphere reserve managers, and functioning biosphere reserves that may help other biosphere reserves to comply with biosphere reserve criteria.