

Response to CBD notification 2009-159, proposals for new and emerging issues

Submission from Canada

Canada fully supports the process of submitting proposals for new and emerging issues. The proposed issues listed in the Annex to notification 2009-159 are interesting, and form the basis for a useful review and discussion at SBSTTA-14.

We recall, however, that decision IX/29 underlined the need to reduce the number of agenda items for consideration by the SBSTTA, asked that proposals be accompanied by supporting information, and provided criteria for assessing the proposals that include evidence of unexpected and significant impacts, urgency, rate of spread, and magnitude of impact on human well-being. In Canada's view, any issues that are identified by SBSTTA for submission to the Conference of the Parties (COP) should meet these strict criteria outlined in paragraph 12 of decision IX/29.

Our assessment is that none of the proposals warrants the elaboration of a full "scientific and technical analysis with options for action" that would be submitted to the COP. We note that most of the proposals lack supporting information, and several involve issues that are already being addressed by the CBD, at least to a degree, such as market-based incentives for conservation, ocean acidification, climate change effects on biodiversity, and impacts of invasive alien species.

We do, however, see merits in considering the proposals in light of how the issues they raise might be addressed within the existing thematic programmes of work and cross-cutting issues of the Convention.

Please find appended some more detailed comments/views specific to the proposals on Ocean Acidification, Arctic Biodiversity, and Marine Protected Areas and Underwater Noise.

Ocean Acidification and Arctic Biodiversity

The proposals on Ocean Acidification and Arctic Biodiversity were both developed in 2008 and contain no new information. Arctic biodiversity is a priority issue, particularly in light of climate change, and it is important that the proposal will examine linking to ongoing projects such as those regarding lower trophic levels, however, it is highly likely that this work is already underway.

Regarding Ocean Acidification, there is a global recognition that ocean acidification is a problem, and funding through EU envelope 7 has been granted to gather information and look at trends to 2013.

MPAs and Underwater Noise

It is unclear what is being proposed. If the proponents' of this item are calling for additional use of acoustic monitoring technologies within MPAs to better identify and understand the potential impacts of ocean noise on those areas, there is merit in this. Moreover such efforts could contribute to addressing some of the gaps in our understanding of the effects of ocean noise on marine life and assist in standardizing the methodologies for such studies, two points which are raised in some of the source documentation cited in this proposal (both Thomsen pieces).

However, if the proposal is to explore the use of buffer zones around MPAs to protect / mitigate these areas from noise pollution then the merit in such an effort is questionable. While buffer zones have a role to play in highly localized noise sources (e.g., seismic operations, pile driving) or particularly sensitive areas (e.g., whale calving grounds) the very transboundary nature of noise suggests that it is an issue which would best be addressed via source mitigation rather than by attempting to buffer or insulate 'refuge areas'. This is particularly the case for underwater

noise where low frequencies can travel hundreds of kilometres and new research is suggesting that climate change may see those distances extended as noise conduction is enhanced in warmer, more acidic oceans.

Diversion of shipping routes, which are typically the shortest route, or ship speed limits would also have implications for noise exposure, be it to other areas or for a longer duration (not to overlook the effects on time and fuel use, and in turn costs and GHG emissions). And it is in part in recognition of this that the International Maritime Organization (IMO) is working on guidance for vessel noise (i.e., criteria for quieter vessels) which should have a positive impact on ocean noise levels.

In short, the issue seems a legitimate one but the approach being proposed to address it is questionable.