CMS COP13 Highlights:
Monday, 17 February 2020

As the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties of CMS opened officially, participants heard opening remarks and paid tribute to the late Executive Secretary of CMS, Bradnee Chambers.

The COP addressed organizational matters and reviewed several reports. The COP also listened to Sergio Costa, Italy, co-chair with UK of the 26th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP26), who underscored the importance of migratory species and connectivity to Italy. He also highlighted the threat of climate change which can impact migration patterns and routes.

Opening Ceremony

In the welcoming address, Chandra Kishore Mishra, Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India, drew attention to his country’s megadiversity and, in noting that Gujarat was home to Mahatma Gandhi, called on COP13 participants to champion the freedom of migratory species the way Gandhi championed human freedom.

In a video address, astronaut Luca Parmitano, European Space Agency, observed that the view from space provides clarity on how all earthly systems are deeply connected and crucial to sustaining all life. Drawing attention to the “unnatural rate and unprecedented scale” of planetary change, he called on CMS COP13 to work on halting the disappearance of migratory species.

Noting that the year 2020 was a “super year” for biodiversity, Joyce Msuya, UNEP, called for the acceleration of efforts to conserve migratory species and habitats. She stressed that ecological connectivity is the means by which multiple countries can agree on shared conservation goals beyond national plans and priorities.

Amy Fraenkel, Executive Secretary, CMS, stressed the important role this meeting will play in shaping the Post-2020 Framework. In light of dramatic declines in migratory species, she identified a need for ongoing flagship reports for CMS on the “State of the World’s Migratory Species.”

Babul Supriyo, Minister of State, Ministry for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India, called for internationally coordinated protection measures for migratory species.

Prakash Javadekar, Minister of Environment, Forestry and Climate Change, India, put CMS COP13 into the Indian context with its rich biodiversity and cultural respect for nature.

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, addressed the COP via video link and welcomed all participants to the land of Mahatma Gandhi. He highlighted some of the many Indian successes in wildlife conservation including the emblematic tiger, lion, elephant, snow leopard, rhinoceros, and the great Indian bustard.

Vijay Rupani, Chief Minister of Gujarat, India, highlighted some of his state’s successful conservation efforts and blessed the Gujarati community for their pride in wildlife protection.

Øystein Størkersen, Norway, called for enhancing collaboration in meeting CMS goals, and to consider climate change as one of the greatest threats to biodiversity.

Ramon Bagat Singh, the Philippines, reflected on CMS’ accomplishments since COP12, noting that the Philippines sponsored a resolution to establish a global network of intertidal wetlands, and highlighted progress made in protecting key sites in his country.

Remembering Bradnee Chambers: John Scanlon gave a heartfelt speech to commemorate the passing of Bradnee Chambers, former Executive Secretary of CMS. He described Chambers’ commitment to improving international environmental governance, both as an academic and as a practitioner. He listed a sample of Chambers’ achievements, including at UN University Tokyo, at UNEP as Chief of Law and Governance Branch, and at CMS. He said Chambers was a major proponent of establishing connectivity between processes, and raised the profile of CMS within the MEA landscape. Scanlon invited delegates to honor his legacy by working together to ensure a strong outcome from COP13.

Soumitra Dasgupta, Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change, India, recalled Chambers’ love and admiration for India, and his vision for COP13 to be held there. He described him as a visionary, dedicated to CMS and the family of interconnected agreements and processes.

Amy Fraenkel, Executive Secretary, CMS, highlighted that he had been instrumental in the Rio +20 process, and in establishing the COP13. He said Chambers was a major proponent of establishing connectivity between processes, and raised the profile of CMS within the MEA landscape. Scanlon invited delegates to honor his legacy by working together to ensure a strong outcome from COP13.

Organizational Matters

Election of Officers: Parties elected by acclamation Prakash Keshav Javadekar (India) as COP13 Chair; Akankwasah Barirega,
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(Uganda) as CoW Chair; and Simon Nemtzov (Israel) as CoW Vice-Chair.

Adoption of the Agenda and Meeting Schedule: Chair Javedakar invited delegates to review the draft provisional agenda (UNEP/CMS/COP13/Doc.6.1/Rev.3) and annotations (UNEP/COP13/Doc.6.2/Rev.1), which the COP adopted.

Adoption of the Rules of Procedure: The Secretariat introduced, and invited delegates to consider the revised Rules of Procedure (UNEP/CMS/COP13/Doc.4/Rev.2). The COP adopted these by acclamation.

Establishment of the Credentials Committee and other Sessional Committees: The COP elected Malawi, Saudi Arabia, the Netherlands and Uruguay to the Credentials Committee.

Admission of Observers: The COP admitted international and national agencies, and bodies that meet the criteria set out in Article VII, paragraph 9 of the Convention to participate at this meeting as observers (UNEP/CMS/COP13/Doc.8/Rev.1).

Reports

Report of the UN Environment Programme: UNEP summarized its report (UNEP/CMS/COP13/Doc.9), highlighting enhanced collaboration, coordination and synergies between CMS and other biodiversity conventions; linkages with the Post-2020 Framework; and UNEP efforts to enhance scientific and technical support.

Reports and Recommendations of the Subsidiary Bodies of the Convention: Standing Committee Chair Størkersen (Norway) described work by the Standing Committee since COP12, highlighting ongoing financial and budgetary concerns, noting that new discussions may be warranted; and the need to be succinct in the CMS' message at the Post-2020 Framework negotiations, highlighting connectivity and the collaborative nature of CMS.

Fernando Spina (Italy), Chair of the Scientific Council, reported on the activity of the Council since COP12, highlighting new initiatives, such as on the economic value of migratory species, connectivity and animal culture perspectives. The report was noted.

Statements: Depositary and Host Country: Germany introduced the report of the depositary (UNEP/CMS/COP13/Doc.11.1), noting that since the last COP, six more countries have acceded to the Convention.

ISRAEL noted that the reservations are very difficult to track on the CMS website.

Outgoing COP Presidency: The Philippines introduced its report (UNEP/CMS/COP13/Doc.11.2), emphasizing several initiatives to advance at the national, regional and international levels the objectives of the Convention, such as advancing the management of marine turtle protected area networks.

Party States statements: The EU called on addressing light pollution, which threatens many migratory species, as well as insect decline. The UK highlighted its commitment to support implementation of the Convention. MONGOLIA highlighted the need to strengthen the nexus between climate change and migratory species conservation. She also stated that the Asian region would like to see a strong Secretariat and reporting system. SOUTH AFRICA emphasized that biodiversity is in a state of emergency.

CMS Agreements: The COP took note of reports from representatives of other MEAs, including CMS Article IV Agreements, IGOs, and NGOs (UNEP/CMS/COP13/Inf.4.1-7).

Report of the Secretariat and Implementation of the Programme of Work 2018-2020: The Secretariat introduced the report on the Programme of Work 2018-2020 (UNEP/CMS/COP13/Doc.19), enumerating many specific initiatives for migratory species that were delivered with limited financial resources. The report was noted.

Opening of the Committee of the Whole: The COP opened the Committee of the Whole (CoW), and established the COP13 working groups for avian, aquatic, and terrestrial species, and for the budget. The Secretariat clarified that other working groups could be established on a needs basis.

Administrative and Budgetary Matters

Budget and Administration: The Secretariat reported on the execution of the CMS Budget 2018-2020 (UNEP/CMS/COP13/Doc.13.1), urging parties to pay their many outstanding contributions at their earliest convenience. The CoW noted the document.

In the Corridors

Throughout the first official day of the CMS COP13, participants continued to highlight the importance of collaboration between MEAs and across Range States that provide temporary but critical homes for threatened migratory species. The need to connect international work with that on the ground was also mentioned several times, with one delegate noting that the adoption of stronger regulations will not be enough if we don’t involve people in conservation, noting that in many corners of the world migratory species are deeply embedded in social, cultural, and spiritual values and practices. On this, one NGO representative was heard asking whether it was time for parties to embrace a stronger role for civil society within the Convention’s work, highlighting the importance of celebrating and commemorating local community champions at the forefront of conservation action.

Participants also heard moving speeches in commemoration of the life and passionate work of late CMS Executive Secretary Bradnee Chambers: many colleagues noted how, as with Gandhi’s teachings, connectivity lay at the heart of Chambers’ vision of how migratory species can be best protected worldwide. Parties were asked to honour his legacy by making COP13 the most successful to date. With record-high numbers of registered participants, some delegates commented that there is room for optimism. Whether the actions of Parties over the remainder of the negotiations will live up to the expectations of those not in the room – Chambers, local communities, and migratory species themselves – remains to be seen.