



## **Support to Building the Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network**

**Trust Fund #TF-030388**

### **Biodiversity Information for Decision Making – International Experiences**

#### **APPENDIX 2**

#### **CASE STUDY: Experience in Developing the Regional EC Clearing House Mechanism**

**(Document 2 - Appendix 2)**

**July 2004**



## **Support to Building the Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network**

### **Biodiversity Information for Decision Making – International Experiences**

#### **APPENDIX 2**

#### **CASE STUDY: Experience in Developing the Regional EC Clearing House Mechanism**

This Appendix accompanies the principal document *Biodiversity Information for Decision Making – International Experiences*. The principal author is Peter Herkenrath, UNEP-WCMC.

## **Table of Contents**

Summary.....	iv
Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
Chapter 2 PURPOSE and ESTABLISHMENT of EC CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM.....	2
2.1 Mandate .....	2
2.2 The European Environment Agency (EEA).....	2
2.3 Purpose, goals and objectives of the EC CHM .....	3
2.4 Establishment of the EC CHM and budget .....	4
2.5 Participation.....	6
2.6 Main features: The website and the national CHMs .....	6
2.7 Current status of the EC CHM .....	8
Chapter 3 LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IABIN .....	10
3.1 Develop a network of committed national focal points.....	10
3.2 Develop a knowledge network amongst the participating countries.....	10
3.3 Allow for cooperation between the regional and the global CHM.....	11
3.4 Support the development of national information structures and national CHMs through the provision of software.....	11
3.5 Use the CHM as a trigger for national action.....	12
3.6 Enable good communication lines with technical staff, on the regional level and with national focal points .....	12
3.7 Develop, monitor and update a contents strategy.....	12
3.8 Define and, to the extent possible, monitor the target groups of the CHM.....	13
3.9 Find the right balance for the metadatabase .....	13
3.10 Maintain well-managed links to participating websites .....	14
3.11 Provide a multilingual CHM .....	14
3.12 Provide for efficient evaluation and feedback mechanisms .....	14
3.13 Ensure maintenance of the CHM beyond the initial funding period.....	14

ANNEX 1 - KEY CONTACTS.....	16
ANNEX 2 – ACRONYMS and ABBREVIATIONS .....	17
ANNEX 3 – INFORMATION SOURCES .....	18

## Summary

In fulfilling their obligations as a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the European Community (EC) in 1998 adopted the EC Biodiversity Strategy. The Strategy carries provisions for the establishment of the EC Clearing-House Mechanism (EC CHM). The EC CHM was developed by the European Environment Agency (EEA), in cooperation with the CHM National Focal Points of several European Union and other European countries. An Italian IT company was contracted to establish the EC CHM, working with the European Centre for Nature. During the development phase of the EC CHM from 1999 to 2003, the national focal points regularly met in person through a Steering Committee, while a Task Force looked at the technical aspects of the EC CHM.

Three *strategic goals* of the EC CHM were identified:

- To facilitate an *information exchange network* towards supporting the implementation of the EC Biodiversity Strategy;
- To promote and facilitate scientific and technical *cooperation*, both within the EC, with national CHMs and with other expert bodies;
- To develop the *network of national focal points* and to enable *organisational efficiency* for the implementation of the EC Biodiversity Strategy and the EC CHM.

The EC CHM has been working closely with the CHM of the CBD and is understood as a regional component of the latter. It is operating through a website, focusing on providing information of relevance for the implementation of the EC Biodiversity Strategy and the CBD in the European Union. The EC CHM has provided a software toolkit to national CHMs and several of those have been designed accordingly.

Of the wide range of originally targeted users, it is particularly civil servants of the EC and national governments involved with the EC Biodiversity Strategy and the CBD who are using the EC CHM, in addition to researchers and international NGOs.

The report assembles a number of lessons learnt from the development phase of the EC CHM and recommendations for the development of the Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network. The recommendations refer to the development of the network of participating focal points, the cooperation with the global CHM, the support from the regional to the national level, technical aspects of the regional CHM, the user groups, the monitoring of the regional mechanism, and the long-term maintenance.

## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

This case study reviews a specific aspect of the European Community's (EC) response to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the European Community Clearing-House Mechanism (EC CHM). Its purpose is to draw lessons and best practices from the European experience useful for the development of IABIN. The case study is based on a review of the EC CHM website, documents from the EC CHM, and interviews with a number of key players as well as UNEP-WCMC's own involvement with the EC CHM.

Both the EC CHM and IABIN constitute a regional response to the CBD Clearing-House Mechanism. They both represent regional nodes of the CBD CHM and attempt to integrate their respective regions' cooperation with the CBD CHM.

There are a number of important differences between the wider environments the EC CHM and IABIN are operating in. The EC CHM encompasses the area of the European Union<sup>1</sup>, a legal entity of 25 European countries. Despite the diversity in cultures and national languages, the EC CHM area constitutes therefore a much closer community than the IABIN area. The exchange of information within Europe can rely to a large extent on existing structures which have been established in the political, economical and social spheres over several decades. The Americas, in contrast, is not only a much bigger region, but does not have such a history of economic, political and social integration. The Organization of American States (OAS), the Executing Agency of IABIN, does not act as a political body representing its members' states in a way the European Union does. In addition, the IABIN region does not have a history of strong information exchange structures, and the task of establishing routes of information exchange and cooperation for building a network as IABIN is much more challenging than in Europe.

---

<sup>1</sup> The legal difference between the European Community and the European Union is not relevant for the purpose of this report and is therefore neglected here.

## CHAPTER 2 PURPOSE AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EC CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM

### 2.1 Mandate

The *legal basis* for the EC Clearing-House Mechanism (EC CHM) is the Council Decision 93/626/EEC of 25 October 1993 concerning the conclusion on the CBD, which enabled the European Community to ratify the Convention on 21 December 1993.

In line with the requirements of Article 6 of the Convention, the European Commission in 1998 adopted a Communication on a European Community Biodiversity Strategy. This Communication outlines in paragraph 21 and 22: ‘...support for consolidation and further development of the Clearing House Mechanism (CHM) which is established as the prime vehicle for international information exchange on biodiversity. The European Environmental Agency and its Information and Observation Network (EIONET) should consolidate and further develop the Community CHM in order to become an efficient vehicle for promoting and facilitating technical and scientific co-operation. This should be needs-driven, decentralised and allow for provision of information useful for meta-data levels of analyses. The provision of information by the CHM is of particular importance for the compilation of national and Community reports and for information on progress in implementing concrete measures for biodiversity. The Community CHM will establish links to the Member States CHM focal points’.

### 2.2 The European Environment Agency (EEA)

The European Environment Agency (EEA) has a mandate defined by Council regulation (EEC) No. 1210/90 to ensure the supply of objective, reliable and comprehensive information at European level, enabling its member states to take the requisite measures to protect their environment, to assess the result of such measures and to insure that the public is properly informed about the state of the environment.

The EEA carries out its tasks in cooperation with the European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET). EIONET is a collaborative network of the European Environment Agency and its member countries, connecting National Focal Points in the EU and accession countries, European Topic Centres, National Reference Centres, and Main Component Elements (the latter are institutions of the national networks, which are regular collectors and suppliers of environmental data). These organisations jointly provide the information that is used for making decisions for improving the state of environment in Europe and making EU policies more effective. EIONET is both a network of organisations and an electronic network (e-EIONET).

### 2.3 Purpose, goals and objectives of the EC CHM

The *purpose* of the EC CHM is defined as follows:

The EC-CHM shall serve the aims of the CBD and its Clearing-House Mechanisms in such a manner that the CBD information of the European Community institutions becomes more easily accessible to the institutions themselves, but at the same time also to the Member States and to the public.

Three *strategic goals* of the EC CHM were identified:

- *Information exchange*: to facilitate the ongoing development and effective use of an information exchange network towards supporting the implementation of the EC Biodiversity Strategy, as the EC response to the CBD;
- *Cooperation*: to develop well-understood and well-utilised procedures and capabilities for the EC CHM to promote and facilitate scientific and technical cooperation, both within the EC, with national CHMs and with other expert bodies;
- *Network development and organisational efficiency*: to continue to develop and support the focal points for the implementation of the EC Biodiversity Strategy and its CHM, and their abilities to support the growing needs of the Strategy and its CHM in a timely manner.

The first meeting of the EC CHM Task Force (see below) agreed on the *objectives* of the EC CHM:

- To meet the EC obligation as a party to the CBD to provide a CHM for the European Community, in addition to the 15 member state responsibilities to provide their own CHMs, as parties in their own right. The objective is not to enforce harmonisation of CHMs, but to facilitate coordination and collaboration.
- To make accessible information maintained by the Commission and other Community institutions ... relevant to the implementation of the CBD, its protocols and other instruments by the European Community.
- To provide links to sources of information relevant to biodiversity managed by the EC and its institutions and to be established as prime Community vehicle for information exchange on biodiversity in order to become an efficient vehicle for promoting and facilitating scientific and technical cooperation.
- To provide links to country CHM focal points and to information sources available through the national CHMs, including allowing linkage of information to biogeographic regions and to cross national boundaries.



- To take into account the process of EC enlargement by providing the option to link to information through non-member CHMs within Europe ... and apply any access functionality developed for linkage to member states CHMs.
- To link to supra-national and thematic CHMs and other sources of information where this would help implement the EC Biodiversity Strategy, or would add value for the member states (i.e. by saving states time or by providing aggregated information).
- ... The EC CHM will provide a road map to information sources, including access to information sources useful for metadata levels of analysis. It should also include the identification and review of existing mechanisms to facilitate the exchange of relevant information through the EC CHM.
- To become a useful tool for the compilation of national and Community reports and the information on progress in implementing concrete measures for biodiversity.

#### 2.4 Establishment of the EC CHM and budget

In order to develop the EC CHM, the European Commission provided the European Environment Agency with funding for the years 1999-2003 through the IDA (Interchange of Data between Administrations) Programme, which is the European Commission's programme for linking Member State administrations with Community institutions.

The *budget* for the EC CHM development phase was EURO 2,879,000. This was split as follows:

- Preparation/feasibility: 20-25%
- Development and validation: 30-35%
- Implementation: 45-50%.

In 1998, the Commission issued a tender for a five-year contract. The work was contracted to *Finsiel*, a private group owned by Telecom Italia and Bank of Italy and at the time the largest Italian information technology integrator and among the top ten in Europe. The *European Centre for Nature Conservation* (ECNC), an independent foundation, acted as a subcontractor to Finsiel, working with the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC, now UNEP-WCMC). While Finsiel was responsible for the technical side of establishing the EC CHM, ECNC worked on the contents.

The contract between the European Community and Finsiel included a number of service packages:

- Produce an operational plan and suggest solutions for setting up a Community CHM and for linking it in a harmonised way to CBD/CHM services developed

nationally or globally, and to the European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET) and other relevant networks;

- Enable setting up and mutual use of core elements occurring in most EC CHM services, in order to allow those countries interested in it to adopt a similar model;
- Test and establish mechanisms for managing aggregated data on EC CHM servers, into, and between them;
- Make the existing EUNIS-related databases readily available via the Community CHM, as well as via the EEA's Reference Centre for Environmental Information and enable data flow from EUNIS to EIONET and other data providers<sup>2</sup>;
- Increase the awareness and promote the use of the infrastructure.

The EEA established a Steering Committee and a Task Force to help in developing the EC CHM. The *Steering Committee* was open to all interested member states of the EC. Other relevant institutions were invited as observers: Council of Europe, WCMC, Secretariat of the CBD and NGOs. The Steering Committee met once or twice a year and advised the EEA on the project direction.

The *Task Force* consisted of representatives from countries with special interest in collaboration. They were appointed by the EEA. Observers included the Secretariat of the CBD. The Task Force met once or twice a year and collaborated with the EEA on technical matters, advising on technical developments and relations with the national CHMs. With the establishment of the EC CHM, formal meetings of the Task Force ceased and were replaced by workshops.

A *Feasibility Study*, carried out by ECNC and WCMC, assessed the availability of information from the European Community relevant to the implementation of the CBD, following a request from the first meeting of the Task Force. At the time, there was no single entry point for biodiversity-related documents from the Commission. In parallel, a prototype website was developed and discussed in 1999 and 2000, before the EC CHM was officially launched in May 2000 at the fifth Conference of the Parties to the CBD in Kenya.

The Steering Committee discussed the role of the EC CHM in relation to the development of national CHMs. Those representing the most advanced national CHMs called for a strong and focused EC CHM that would add value to the national CHMs and help connect them.

---

<sup>2</sup> EUNIS is the European Nature Information System, developed and managed by the European Topic Centre on Nature Protection and Biodiversity (ETC/NPB in Paris) for the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET).

## 2.5 Participation

Key *partners* in the EC CHM are the following:

- The institutions of the EC
- The EEA and the national focal points of EIONET
- The national focal points to the CBD CHM from the countries of the EEA<sup>3</sup>
- The secretariats of the CBD and the Pan-European Biodiversity and Landscape Diversity Strategy
- Information suppliers
- Other information users.

The suggested *users* of the EC CHM are as follows:

- The institutions of the EC
- Parties to the CBD, particularly in the EU region
- National governments
- Other national organisations
- European (and other) international NGOs
- Economic and corporate sector
- Research sector
- Education sector
- Media
- General public.

## 2.6 Main features: The website and the national CHMs

The main feature of the EC CHM is the website, accessible at <http://biodiversity-chm.eea.eu.int/>. The homepage, as accessed on 1 July 2004, is reproduced here.

---

<sup>3</sup> This includes non-EU countries such as Norway, Iceland, Russia and Switzerland.

EC-CHM - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Back Forward Stop Home Search Favorites Media Print Mail

Address <http://biodiversity-chm.eea.eu.int/> Go Links

Google Search Web 52 blocked AutoFill Options

**EC-CHM** European Community Biodiversity Clearing-House Mechanism  
 Supporting the Convention on Biological Diversity

| CBD-CHM | EUROPA | DG ENVIRONMENT | DG ENV-NATURE | EEA | BIOSAFETY-CHM | GBIF | EUNIS | BEG | SEARCH:

| HOME | LOGIN | NEWS | STORIES | EVENTS | WHO'S WHO | ABOUT | OTHER SEARCHES | SITEMAP | SERVICES | GLOSSARY | MYPOR TAL

**CONVENTION AND POLICY**  EC-CHM

- [CBD at Global level](#)
- [CBD at Pan-European and Regional level](#)
- [CBD at European Community level](#)
- [CBD at National level](#)
- [Other biodiversity related conventions, Europe](#)

**COOPERATION**

- [Technical / scientific cooperation](#)
- [Research directories, programmes, projects](#)
- [Funding of biodiversity projects](#)

**ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS**

- [CBD's who's who](#)
- [European Community who's who](#)
- [Other biodiversity organisations and networks](#)

**INFORMATION**

- [Biodiversity data profiles](#)
- [Biodiversity monitoring and indicators](#)
- [Databases and information sites](#)
- [Directories and reference services](#)
- [Documents and Images](#)
- [Selected species groups](#)
- [Alien species](#)
- [Red Lists](#)
- [Genetic diversity and resources](#)
- [Biodiversity projects, temporary refs](#)

**The Malahide Message - more than 200 stakeholders agreed to 18 biodiversity targets**

Posted on 2004/06/23

More than 200 stakeholder representatives from the 25 EU countries and from various NGOs agreed late this May in Malahide in Ireland on 18 very concrete targets on how we together can work towards reaching the EU target to stop the loss of biodiversity by 2010. The Malahide Message was sent from the Irish Presidency to the European Commission and to the EU countries to help guide the political decisions to be taken now and in the next years. The main message was clear: we cannot reach the 2010 target, unless direct and focused action to enhance biodiversity conditions is taken both on nature conservation and in the important sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and forestry, but also on water, tourism, transport, energy and environmental pollution. The focus now on biodiversity in EU and in Europe is an integral part of the global concern expressed in the work under the Convention on Biological Diversity and formulated in the latest conference of the parties in February. The Malahide Message: [http://www.dk-chm.dk/convention/cbd\\_regional/F1084886121/1086862003](http://www.dk-chm.dk/convention/cbd_regional/F1084886121/1086862003) . Malahide web site: [http://www.ue2004.ie/templates/meeting.asp?sNavlocator=5,418,13&list\\_id=193](http://www.ue2004.ie/templates/meeting.asp?sNavlocator=5,418,13&list_id=193).

[More details...](#)

**Biodiversity monitoring and indicators in Europe - First meeting of Biodiversity Coordination Team at EEA, Copenhagen, 7 July 2004**

Posted on 2004/06/23

Following the Joint Eionet/BioMIN/PEBLDS meeting 'Development of plan and guidelines for indicators and monitoring to help achieve the 2010 target for biodiversity in Europe', the PEBLDS Bureau endorsed the revised action plan for monitoring and indicators, and the Malahide Conference endorsed the EU list of headline biodiversity indicators as well as an objective and targets for the development of monitoring, indicators and reporting - and their funding/coordination. EEA will therefore move forward to establish a Coordination Team and experts groups as proposed in the Joint meeting. The Coordination Team is proposed to be limited to EEA and its ETC, ECNC and UNEP-WCMC, having staff who can contribute a significant amount of time. Representatives from the European Commission, PEBLDS secretariat, the MCPFE Liaison Unit Warsaw (forest indicators) and Czech Republic (the latter as lead country for the PEBLDS action plan) are also invited to the first coordination team meeting to kick off the work/planning on 7 July. Contact in EEA: Gordon McInnes, EEA [gordon.mcinnnes@eea.eu.int](mailto:gordon.mcinnnes@eea.eu.int). Information about the Joint Meeting: <http://biodiversity-chm.eea.eu.int/information/indicator/F1078143615> The Malahide Message: [http://www.dk-chm.dk/convention/cbd\\_regional/F1084886121/1086862003](http://www.dk-chm.dk/convention/cbd_regional/F1084886121/1086862003)

[More details](#)

The website is organised as a portal, with a dual function: A metadatabase, and a set of passive links to relevant information and data holding institutions. Since the launch of the EC CHM, it has increasingly preferred generic links over specific links to avoid keeping links to pages that don't exist anymore. The latter challenge is also being addressed through regular link checks.

An example for the *links* to information held by other institutions is the link to the EIONET database:

Information >> Red Lists >> Red Books on Species and Habitats of European Concern >> <http://nature.eionet.eu.int/activities/products/redbooks/index.html> (on the EIONET website). This page is maintained by the European Topic Centre for Nature Protection and Biodiversity. From here, the user can access global, regional, European and national Red Data Books on threatened species of fauna and flora.

The collaboration of national focal points to the CBD CHM has enabled a number of them in Europe to design their *national websites* with the help of the EC CHM. The German and Czech Republic's national CHM websites follow the same design as the EC CHM website. In addition, Denmark, Albania, Italy and Estonia have used an EC CHM toolkit for designing their national websites. The toolkit has been provided by the EC CHM for free and enables national CHMs to use the EC CHM software for their own website development. A number of countries, including those from Eastern Europe that are about to join the EU, have expressed an interest to make use of the toolkit.

## 2.7 Current status of the EC CHM

By the end of 2003, the development phase had finished with funding by IDA coming to an end. At this occasion, the national focal points were consulted about the achievements of the EC CHM and future prospects. The results of this exercise are not yet available. The joint Central and Eastern European regional meeting of the CBD CHM and the EC CHM in Prague, September 2003, expressed the need for 'annual Pan-European CHM Focal Point meetings for exchange of experience, capacity-building as well as technical training and requested the involvement of the EC CHM<sup>4</sup>.

The EEA will continue managing the EC CHM, including the content and the technical component, but is seeking further funding for the expansion of the EC CHM. A funding application is currently with the European Commission.

---

<sup>4</sup> See report from the meeting, available as a background document to the seventh Conference of the Parties to the CBD (UNEP/CBD/COP/7/INF/5).

With the development phase, the mandate of the Steering Committee ceased, but it is expected that the functions of the Committee will be continued once new funding has been confirmed.

## CHAPTER 3 LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IABIN

### 3.1 Develop a network of committed national focal points

In accordance with the provisions of the CBD in article 18 (3) for the CBD Clearing-House Mechanism, the EC Biodiversity Strategy views the EC CHM as ‘an efficient vehicle for promoting and facilitating technical and scientific co-operation’. It has been difficult to identify mechanisms to facilitate this scientific and technical cooperation, mirroring similar problems that the CBD CHM at the global level has been facing. The visible product of the according efforts is the EC CHM website.

A website is not necessarily facilitating cooperation, and other mechanisms have become important in fostering cooperation. For the EC CHM, the collaboration of the national CHM focal points through the Steering Committee and the Task Force has been crucial. The meetings of these bodies brought together those national focal points that were enthusiastic about regional collaboration (while a number of EU countries never got engaged with the process). The well prepared meetings enabled the establishment of crucial personal contacts. This would not have been possible through purely electronic links such as e-mail groups without physical meetings. The high costs for bringing participants of the Steering Committee together from a region extending from Iceland to Eastern Europe were well invested.

The informal character of the Steering Committee – which has been an advisory body without a decision-taking role – has enabled open discussions and has led to a high degree of identification of the focal points with the project. This way, bureaucratic procedures were avoided and a high degree of influence over the development of the EC CHM was achieved.

IABIN has clearly defined the roles of its bodies, including taking policy and technical decisions. It is important that the IABIN bodies carry out their work in an open atmosphere, allowing for the development of a network of focal points that are highly committed to the process, not least through holding personal meetings where bureaucratic procedures are being avoided. It is recommended for that reason that IABIN invests in building the capacity of individual national focal points.

### 3.2 Develop a knowledge network amongst the participating countries

The ultimate aim of a clearing-house mechanism, the promotion and facilitation of technical and scientific cooperation, could take the form of a knowledge network between the participating countries where standardised information is being developed, maintained and exchanged. The EC CHM so far has achieved a good amount of cooperation between several of the European countries. Most of them

would like to see a much closer collaboration between the national CHMs and envisage a common surface, provided by the EC CHM, through which the focal points communicate and also develop their national CHMs. Some other countries, however, remain reluctant to move towards the standardisation of information.

A number of options has been informally discussed for further enhancing the information exchange, for example through discussion groups and provisions for on-line commenting, although this would require considerable staff time that is not necessarily available. A further step would be to develop a joint information pool for selected issues, such as information relevant for measuring progress towards the global CBD target of significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. Ideally, all countries would make their information available through a joint portal and joint search machines at the EC CHM and the national websites.

It is recommended that IABIN uses common themes such as measuring progress towards the 2010 target as a milestone for bringing together the IABIN countries and thus building the Inter-American knowledge network of the participating countries.

### **3.3 Allow for cooperation between the regional and the global CHM**

The EC CHM has always been viewed as the regional counterpart of the global CBD CHM. The latter has consequently been closely involved in developing the EC CHM. The CBD Secretariat, through the CHM Programme Officer, participated in the meetings of the Steering Committee and the Task Force. Also, the EC CHM has taken an active part in the development of the CBD CHM, allowing for both sides to benefit substantially from the cooperation. Recently, the CBD CHM has significantly expanded its information service, offering a wide range of biodiversity-related information, covering the national, regional and global levels. In response, the EC CHM has increasingly offered links to relevant CBD CHM websites instead of providing specific information itself. The EC CHM has been trying to find its niche next to the CBD CHM, with providing specific information relevant to the European level. This comprises information from Europe, but also, for example, reports from global meetings from a European perspective and for a European audience.

It is recommended that IABIN maintains its clearly defined role regarding the CBD CHM and its national focal points in the Americas. IABIN should also continue to actively participate in the further development of the CBD CHM.

### **3.4 Support the development of national information structures and national CHMs through the provision of software**

A crucial element in fostering the cooperation of European national focal points has been the EC CHM's free provision of a toolkit to the focal points who thus



were enabled to design their national CHM webpages in a similar manner and to develop their biodiversity information infrastructure. Although not all countries have made use of this offer, it marks an important step in allowing national structures to be part of the EU and wider Pan-European network of the CHM. This is especially relevant for countries with economies in transition from Central and Eastern Europe who have not necessarily had sufficient resources available to develop their own CHM and the underlying information structure.

It is recommended that IABIN develops support mechanisms, including the provision of software that help the participating States with the development of their own corresponding national CHMs.

### **3.5 Use the CHM as a trigger for national action**

It is very difficult to measure the extent to which national action has been stimulated by the EC CHM. The establishment of national CHMs, following the design of the EC CHM, such as in the Czech Republic and Germany, can easily be allocated to the EC CHM. Other projects have certainly benefited from the cooperation through the EC CHM, for example the German CHM's internet-based nature observation project for kids, and a similar project in Russia.

It is recommended that IABIN develops a mechanism for national focal points to report back to IABIN on any national action that has been stimulated by the IABIN information facilities.

### **3.6 Enable good communication lines with technical staff, on the regional level and with national focal points**

The technicians of Finsiel had the resources to discuss technical issues with the national focal points. This has been very helpful for some of the latter in their efforts to develop their national websites in accordance with the EC CHM. On the other hand, it was noted that the collaboration between the two consultants, in charge of the technical aspects and the contents, respectively, sometimes suffered from a lack of clarity about technical terms, so it is important that all involved 'speak the same language' and are able to communicate effectively.

It is recommended that IABIN pays particular attention to clear lines of communication between those involved with the technical and content aspects, respectively, amongst and between the regional and the national level.

### **3.7 Develop, monitor and update a contents strategy**

For the EC CHM, the Steering Committee, *inter alia* through the Feasibility Study, agreed on the contents of the EC CHM, but it has been difficult for the contents manager to strictly keep to these early decisions. Needs for new, additional and specific information arise for example when significant meetings come up, such as the Conference of the Parties to the CBD.

It is recommended that IABIN develops a contents strategy that is regularly monitored. Mechanisms for regularly updating it should be in place.

### **3.8 Define and, to the extent possible, monitor the target groups of the CHM**

Only a small fraction of the wide range of the intended users is to be found amongst the actual frequent users of the EC CHM. As far as known, the latter are mainly comprised of EC and national officials directly involved with the EC Biodiversity Strategy and/or the CBD, as well as researchers, research institutions, international NGOs, and to a lesser extent journalists. An increase of usage by European Commission civil servants has been observed in recent years.

The following groups, relevant to the implementation of the EC Biodiversity Strategy and the CBD, apparently do not make use of the EC CHM to any wider extent: European Community and national government/agency officials from sectors other than those directly involved with CBD issues (*e.g.* officials from the agricultural and forestry sectors), the economic sector, the education sector, the general public. The reasons for this are not clear, but are likely to consist of a mixture of the EC CHM not being well-known, the lack of promotion of the EC CHM by national governments and agencies, and the availability of powerful general search machines that many Internet users prefer to use for finding specific information.

It is recommended that IABIN defines the target groups of the IABIN information services and monitors the usage. Additionally, a strategy for informing the targeted users about the options IABIN and the facilities it offers would be helpful.

### **3.9 Find the right balance for the metadatabase**

Being part of the well-developed structure of the European Community, the EC CHM has had the opportunity to develop its own metadatabase to a much bigger extent than other regional CHMs might have. However, with the development of other well equipped biodiversity information mechanisms, particularly the CBD CHM, the EC CHM's own metadatabase has in parts become less important. The EC CHM has increasingly been using direct links to external institutions to offer access to the information a user might require. It has therefore been a challenge for the EC CHM to maintain a well balanced metadatabase. Nevertheless, the EC CHM remains widely seen as the central portal for biodiversity information within the European Union and the wider Europe although challenges for its further development remain.

It is recommended that IABIN puts a strong focus on the development of a well balanced metadatabase that takes into account other related databases (such as the global CHM) and user needs for links to external biodiversity information sources.

### **3.10 Maintain well-managed links to participating websites**

As the EC CHM relies heavily on links to webpages of other institutions, some of the information accessible through the EC CHM becomes outdated. This is to the widest extent beyond the control of the EC CHM. Sufficient staff time would enable the EC CHM to follow-up on such problems. The provision of links to websites that are no longer available or have become outdated, has been met by increasingly providing links to more generic pages. This carries the danger of becoming user-unfriendly if the information in question is not easily accessible from the generic link. Ideally, protocols between the institutions involved would provide for either maintaining pages of relevance to other institutions, informing these institutions of changes to the webpages, or automatically redirect users to new locations.

It is recommended that IABIN establishes protocols with the relevant institutions enabling for an efficient maintenance of up-to-date links from the IABIN website.

### **3.11 Provide a multilingual CHM**

The EC CHM is currently providing its services only in English. Particularly given the current expansion of the EU into Eastern Europe, where English is not as widely spoken as in Western Europe, multilingual services are envisaged for the future development of the EC CHM.

It is recommended that IABIN aims to provide at least the core services in the most relevant languages of the American region (Spanish, English, Portuguese).

### **3.12 Provide for efficient evaluation and feedback mechanisms**

An evaluation of the development phase of the EC CHM by national CHM focal points has been taken place at the end of 2003. The results are not yet known. No independent evaluation has been carried out. Also, the information needs of the targeted users have not been evaluated beyond the Steering Committee and the Task Force. However, the latter bodies have provided regular feedback to the EC CHM.

The general user is invited to provide feedback through the website but not much use is being made of that. This option is rather used for posting general questions on biodiversity.

It is recommended that IABIN establishes mechanisms for regular feedback from its national partners and its day-by-day users. In addition, an evaluation of IABIN by an independent agent should take place in regular intervals.

### **3.13 Ensure maintenance of the CHM beyond the initial funding period**

As outlined above, the funding for the development phase of the EC CHM came to an end by the end of 2003. It has been stressed that failing to obtain a new round of funding would considerably limit any further expansion of the services of

the EC CHM. However, the EEA has been able to embed the management of the EC CHM website into their programme and thus, the maintenance of the website is currently and at least for the immediate future guaranteed.

It is recommended that plans for the long-term functioning of IABIN beyond the period of funding provided by the World Bank are developed well in time, with sufficient financial and human resources and appropriate agreements with hosting and cooperating institutions.

## ANNEX 1 - KEY CONTACTS

Ben Delbaere, European Centre for Nature Conservation: [delbaere@ecnc.org](mailto:delbaere@ecnc.org)

Guy Duke, European Commission: [Guy.DUKE@cec.eu.int](mailto:Guy.DUKE@cec.eu.int)

Horst Freiberg, German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation:  
[horst.freiberg@bfm.de](mailto:horst.freiberg@bfm.de)

Jackie van Goethem, Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences:  
[jackie.vangoethem@naturalsciences.be](mailto:jackie.vangoethem@naturalsciences.be)

Carlos Martin-Novella, Ministerio de Medio Ambiente (Spain): [carlos.martin-novella@skynet.be](mailto:carlos.martin-novella@skynet.be)

Jukka Pekka Jäppinen, Finnish Environment Institute: [Jukka-Pekka.Jappinen@ymparisto.fi](mailto:Jukka-Pekka.Jappinen@ymparisto.fi)

Ulla Pinborg, European Environment Agency: [Ulla.Pinborg@eea.eu.int](mailto:Ulla.Pinborg@eea.eu.int)

Lawrence Way, Joint Nature Conservation Committee:  
[lawrence.way@jncc.gov.uk](mailto:lawrence.way@jncc.gov.uk)

UNEP-WCMC is grateful to these key contacts for providing their views and information on the EC CHM. Without their support, this report would not have been possible.

## **ANNEX 2 – ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CHM	Clearing-House Mechanism
COP	Conference of the Parties
EAEC	European Atomic Energy Community
EC	European Community
EC CHM	European Community Clearing-House Mechanism
ECNC	European Centre for Nature Conservation
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EEA	European Environment Agency
EEC	European Economic Community
EIONET	European Environment Information and Observation Network
ETC/NPB	European Topic Centre on Nature Protection and Biodiversity
EU	European Union
EUNIS	European Nature Information System
IABIN	Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network
IDA	Interchange of Data between Administrations
IT	Information technology
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OAS	Organization of American States
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
US	United States of America
WCMC	World Conservation Monitoring Centre

### ANNEX 3 – INFORMATION SOURCES

- CBD Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM):  
<http://www.biodiv.org/chm/default.aspx>
- Communication of the European Commission on a European Community Biodiversity Strategy:  
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/docum/9842en.pdf>
- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD): <http://www.biodiv.org>
- EC Habitats and Bird Directives:  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature\\_biodiversity/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature_biodiversity/index_en.htm)
- European Centre for Nature Conservation (ECNC): <http://www.ecnc.nl>
- European Commission's activities in the field of biodiversity:  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/biodiversity/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/biodiversity/index_en.htm)
- European Community Clearing-House Mechanism (EC CHM):  
<http://biodiversity-chm.eea.eu.int/>
- European Environment Agency (EEA): <http://www.eea.eu.int/>
- European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET):  
<http://www.eionet.eu.int/>
- European Nature Information System (EUNIS):  
<http://eunis.eea.eu.int/index.jsp>
- European Topic Centre on Nature Protection and Biodiversity (ETC/NPB):  
<http://nature.eionet.eu.int/>
- European Union (EU): <http://europa.eu.int>
- Finsiel: <http://www.finsiel.it/>