

**UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION**  
**International Co-ordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme**

Thirty-first session

**UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, Room IV (Fontenoy Building)**  
17 – 21 June 2019

**ITEM 7 OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA: Implementation of the "Process of Excellence and Enhancement of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) as well as Quality Improvement of All Members of the World Network"**

**Part A : Background**

1. In June 2017, at its 29th session, the MAB Council adopted a '**Process of excellence and enhancement of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) as well as Quality Improvement of all Members of the World Network**' (see Annex 2). It decided to complete the "Exit Strategy" in 2020 and to institute this process to ensure that biosphere reserves serve as models for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
2. In July 2018, at its 30<sup>th</sup> session the MAB Council decided to establish an ad-hoc group working on the "Process of excellence and enhancement of the WNBR as well as quality improvement of all members of the World Network" in order to take advantage of the opportunities of the process beyond 2020 (see Annex 1).
3. The Ad hoc working group members (see Annex 1) met virtually four times and prepared a proposal for the consideration of the MAB Council, **including a decision to be considered by the MAB council at this session, contained in page 7 of this document.**

**Part B : Proposal from the excellence ad hoc working group**

**General principles**

When a site is designated within the MAB programme of UNESCO, the Member states commit to ensuring high quality features for nominated sites and to the implementation of the Statutory framework, the MAB principles and to UNESCO values;

The MAB Council, taking stock of the lessons learnt and results from the "exit strategy", as well as the periodic review process, have decided to develop and implement a "Process of excellence and enhancement of the WNBR as well as quality improvement of all members of the World Network" in order to take advantage of the opportunities of the process beyond 2020;

Since their designation, some biosphere reserve have encountered or may encounter difficulties in management and need to be helped and supported;

The main purpose of the excellence process is to ensure continuous high-quality across the WNBR, which will be a network of well-functioning biosphere reserves that conform to the Statutory Framework and current Plan of Action;

The excellence process is thus designed to facilitate management and development of each individual biosphere reserve, and thus the entire WNBR;

Consequently, it is a long-term endeavor that aims to create a sustainable support mechanism for biosphere reserves that may face difficulties in conforming to the statutory framework;

If biosphere reserves are to be considered as « models for sustainable development» enhancing the quality and excellence of the biosphere reserves and of the WNBR is crucial, if the WNBR is to make a significant contribution to the implementation of the SDGs and agenda 2030;

Biosphere reserves entail key features embracing conservation, management and sites for promoting human well-being that no other designation possesses.

The experiences, skills and competences of the biosphere reserves, regional networks and the WNBR can be mobilized to help the implementation of this excellence process.

The MAB Programme needs to reinforce its links with Biodiversity and Sustainable Development related frameworks and agreements, as well as with Science-policy interfaces such as Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES);

There are opportunities to increase the contribution of the WNBR especially in the context of Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030 and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity with the concert of « Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECM)» and work with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in the framework of their territories of life and community conserved areas (ICCA).

Biosphere reserves and the WNBR need to work in cooperation with the core mandate of UNESCO and field of competences: Education, Science and Culture;

A short and easy review mechanism, coordinated by the MAB national committee and/or focal point, 5 years after the designation, or last periodic review report, will help to monitor the progress of biosphere reserves especially in implementing the Lima Action Plan and the SDGs;

The excellence process should be linked to the on-going work on the technical guidelines, especially as regards the implementation of the statutory framework criteria.

Communication is key for supporting the individual biosphere reserve and the WNBR. Support should be provided for regular, quality and efficient communication between the biosphere reserves in a country; between the biosphere reserves and the national level; between the

biosphere reserves, the national level and the regional networks; between biosphere reserves and MAB national committees with the MAB secretariat and UNESCO field offices.

In terms of financial support, liaison from Member states to existing organizations, mechanisms and donors such as Global Environment Facility (GEF), Green Climate Fund, European Union, World Bank, etc. are suggested to help prioritize actions/programs/projects in biosphere reserves.

The MAB Council could suggest that UNESCO consider becoming, if possible, an Implementing Organisation or Accredited Entity to the Green Climate Fund. National Commissions, National Authority or MAB National Committee would be able to profit from that situation in submitting projects and attract funds.

These general principles are translated in the following concrete recommendations as adopted by the MAB Council in 2017 and updated by the ad hoc excellence-working group. These recommendations are based on existing practices and process such as the periodic review report and aim to enhance their efficiency and impact for the benefit of the individual biosphere reserve and of the WNBR.

### **Recommendations to support individual biosphere reserves especially in the context of conforming to the Statutory Framework**

The role of the MAB national committee is key in the excellence process for quality control, support and for sharing information in between the periodic review reports.

Support to biosphere reserves that are not conforming to the Statutory Framework or have difficulties in reporting the results of their periodic review process from the MAB national committee are suggested through:

- **Encouraging** national authorities to link the implementation of the MAB Strategy (2015-2025) and Lima Action Plan (2016-2025) with that of Sustainable Development Goals;
- **Identifying** the difficulties and defining the processes and mechanisms to resolve typical issues faced by biosphere reserves and solutions, using the diversity of the WNBR, and the technical operational guidelines where appropriate;
- **Suggesting** a few indicators of excellence that are simple, clear and aligned to existing plans such as the Lima Action Plan and MAB strategy at each MAB Council session to track the implementation of this process. Such indicators could include a baseline set of data provided to each MAB Council session to review how many sites are not meeting the criteria and/or are asked additional information; how many of these sites have benefited from support from national/regional/international MAB constituencies;

- **Encouraging** Indigenous peoples and local communities practices, supporting their current actions, strengthening their involvement and encouraging their participation in the development of their biosphere reserve;
- **Organizing** specific technical workshops targeting difficult issues such as zonation and governance. Host countries would need to cover the costs of such workshops. Such workshops would ideally be systematically organized and facilitated at regional network meetings (use the regional networks meetings with a support desk workshop being organized for new biosphere reserve proposals and periodic review reports);
- **Encouraging** eligible UNESCO National Commissions and MAB national Committees to apply for financial support through the UNESCO Participation Programme;
- **Requesting** existing UNESCO Chairs and Centres linked to the MAB programme to provide courses and training facilities to requesting sites and countries;
- **Mobilizing** existing expertise and human resources for technical and support missions, including inviting experts of the International Advisory Committee (active and from previous mandates), 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 where available, and no fees should be provided as per common practice in the MAB Programme;
- **Using** peer support in preparing periodic reviews. A biosphere reserve that already meets the criteria can support and guide a site that is having difficulties to undertake the periodic review exercise. This peer process would be undertaken on a voluntary basis.

### **Roles in support of the implementation of the excellence process**

The texts below summarize the role of each constituency of the MAB Programme in the implementation of the excellence strategy/process at different levels:

#### *Biosphere Reserve*

- Responsible for sharing contact information with the MAB national committee and MAB Secretariat, including on the website;
- Responsible to alert the MAB national committee/national authority of any difficulty in meeting the Statutory Framework criteria;
- Responsible to provide support to the individual biosphere reserve to meet the Statutory Framework criteria;
- Responsible to monitor the quality of the periodic review forms received from biosphere reserve;

- Responsible to conduct a mid –term review every 5 years to ensure that progress is being made and that any major issue is being dealt with in time;
- Request technical assistance to the MAB national committee, MAB Secretariat and /or UNESCO field offices;
- Participate in regional networks meeting and World congress;
- Complete and submit on time the periodic review report.

*MAB National Committee/MAB focal point /National Authority*

- Responsible to provide support to National Authority and the individual biosphere reserve to meet the statutory framework criteria;
- Responsible to provide support in mobilizing resources;
- Responsible to monitor with the National Authority the quality of the periodic review forms received from biosphere reserve;
- Participate with the National Authority in conducting a mid –term review every 5 years to ensure that progress is being made and that any major issue is being dealt with in time;
- Responsible to facilitating easy review mechanism of progress and implementation and alert the MAB Secretariat if any issue in time;
- Responsible to seek for guidance and support from UNESCO in case of difficulties.

*UNESCO national commission*

- Support requests from MAB National Committee or the National Authority for technical help to the individual biosphere reserve to meet the statutory framework criteria;
- Responsible to provide support in mobilizing resources;

*Regional networks*

- Responsible to provide support to the individual biosphere reserves by sharing good practices and organizing support help desk workshops at each regional meeting;
- Responsible to organize workshops to review the implementation of the LAP;
- Responsible to facilitate peer review and joint collaborative projects, including twinning.

*UNESCO field Offices*

Support requests for technical help (mission, information exchange) and in mobilizing resources for national biosphere reserves;

*MAB Secretariat*

- Support requests for technical help (mission, information exchange);

- Mobilizing resources for the WBRN;
- Ensure smooth communication between the different MAB constituencies including through a regularly updated website;
- Supporting synergies and cooperative agreements with frameworks and agreements including SDGs, OECM and ICCA, IPCC, IPBES and biodiversity-relevant MEAs through the Biodiversity Liaison Group.

#### *International Advisory Committee*

Provide explicit evaluations and clear recommendations to the National Authority and biosphere reserves and alert the MAB Council on emerging issues of concern shared by several biosphere reserves.

#### *MAB Bureau*

- Review the Advisory Committee recommendations and recommend final and clear decisions to the MAB Council;
- Support the implementation of the LAP, monitoring and evaluating;
- Mobilize resources for the WBRN;
- Reinforcing links with Biodiversity and Sustainable Development related agreements and Scientific bodies such as IPCC, IPBES;

#### *MAB Council*

- Monitor the overall excellence process and agree on indicators to measure progress in the implementation;
- Organize support for biosphere reserve and countries if difficulties persist.

### **Proposed decision to the MAB Council**

Based on the lessons learnt from the exit strategy and results achieved, and following its decision taken at its 30<sup>th</sup> session in 2017

The MAB Council decides that:

**The process of excellence will be introduced from 1 January 2020**, and the process will follow the recommendations and roles in support outlined above;

To help the financial cost of implementing the Process of excellence, Member States are **invited** to contribute to the MAB Fund to support some of the activities mentioned above, in order to make the WBRN available as a powerful tool to enhance the credibility and quality of its sites, and demonstrate cooperation and solidarity in action; and

**Request** UNESCO to consider becoming, if possible, an Implementing Organisation or Accredited Entity to the Green Climate Fund.



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## Annexes

### Annex 1 TOR's ad hoc working group (MAB Council report 2018)

**The Council decided to establish an ad-hoc group working on the** “Process of excellence and enhancement of the WNBR as well as quality improvement of all members of the World Network” in order to take advantage of the opportunities of the process beyond 2020.

1. **The Working group has following mandate:**

- To further develop the “Process of excellence and enhancement of the WNBR as well as quality improvement of all members of the World Network” and its implementation;
- To prepare input for discussion and to allow a decision on the Excellence Process and its implementation to be taken by the 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the MAB-ICC in 2020.

2. The Council requested the working group to take into consideration the decision taken at the 29<sup>th</sup> MAB Council session on the “Exit strategy” (see below Annex 2) and the lessons and results learnt from this strategy as well as the Periodic Review Process in general.

3. It furthermore requested the WG to present its findings and recommendations for discussion and consideration to the next 31<sup>st</sup> Session of the MAB Council as to provide further guidance to the process.

4. The Council also requested the Secretariat to call on the Member States to nominate the representatives to the ad-hoc working group by early September.

5. **The Members shall be as follows:**

- 2 ICC-members by UNESCO Regional Group
- The Chairperson of the ICC
- The Chairperson of IACBR

6. The Secretariat indicated that after the approval of the periodic review and follow up recommendations by the MAB Council, 64 sites in 31 countries were still concerned by the excellence process. Delegates expressed their satisfaction on the progress made so far and the need to pursue the efforts in the implementation of the excellence process.

### Members of the 2019 Excellence ad hoc working group



Group 1 : Europe and North America

- 1 – France : Mr Didier Babin
- 2 – Sweden : Ms Johanna Mac Taggart

Group 2 : Europe

- 1- Russian Federation : Mr Valery Neronov
- 2- Slovakia: Mrs. Zuzana Guziova

Group 3 : Asia and Pacific

- Australia: M. Peter.Bridgewater
- Republic of Korea : Ms. Shim, Suk-kyung

Group 4 : Arab States

- Oman : Dr. Thuraya Said AISareeri
- Sudan : Dr. Suad Ali Mirghani

Group 5: Africa

- Madagascar : Dr BAOHANTA Rondro
- South Africa: Dr. Vongani Maringa

Group 6: Latin America and the Caribbean

- Haiti : M. Dieufort DESLORGES
- Mexico : Mrs. Maria Pia Gallina Tessaro

- President of the MAB Council : Prof Enny Sudarmonowati, Indonesia
- Chair of the Advisory Committee: Petr Cupa, elected on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2019
- MAB Secretariat : Meriem Bouamrane

**Annex 2. Extract on the decision on the “Process of excellence and enhancement of the WNBR as well as quality improvement of all members of the World Network’ (2017 MAB Council report)**

The MAB Council decides to complete the “Exit Strategy” in 2020 and to institute a ‘Process of excellence and enhancement of the WNBR as well as quality improvement of all members of the World Network’, to ensure that they serve as models for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The MAB Council decides the following with regard to the sites concerned by the “Exit Strategy”:

1. **For sites which have provided information and meet the criteria**, the MAB Council warmly congratulates the Member States concerned and expresses its thanks to all stakeholders who have engaged in this important process.

2. Furthermore, the MAB Council encourages the MAB Secretariat, the National Commissions for UNESCO, the National MAB Committees and the concerned biosphere reserves to convey positive messages that inform about and celebrate this success.

3. The Council further acknowledges that certain Member States have decided to withdraw sites under their jurisdiction from the World Network and congratulates them on showing their commitment in this way.

4. **For BR in conflict zones**, the MAB Council decides that these sites remain in the WNBR as long as these conflicts continue. These sites should not be obliged to send a report. The Secretariat and the WNBR will support the BR concerned to the extent possible. When the conflict ceases, the BR should be supported by the National Committee and the Secretariat, the Regional networks and the WNBR including an evaluation of the conditions to advise the BR and the national Committee on how the BR can fulfil its obligations under the Statutory framework.

5. **For transboundary BR**, the MAB Council adopts the following process:

- a. The Member States must submit the national periodic report by 30 September 2017;
- b. This information will be evaluated by the IACBR and then the MAB Council in 2018;
- c. Member States will have the option to provide complementary information after evaluation by the IACBR;
- d. The MAB Council will determine in 2018 whether the site meets the criteria;

- e. The MAB Secretariat and the World Network will support the transboundary biosphere reserves in their specific challenges.

**6. For BR which have provided comprehensive information, which has been evaluated by the IACBR and the MAB Council, but the site does not meet the criteria, the Council adopts the following process:**

- a. The Member States must submit additional information/answers to the MAB Secretariat by 30 September 2017 or 2018;
- b. This information will be evaluated by the IACBR and then the MAB Council in 2018 and/or 2019;
- c. Member States will have the option to provide complementary information after the evaluation by the IACBR;
- d. The MAB Council will determine in 2018 and 2019 whether the site meets the criteria;
- e. In the case the Biosphere reserve meets the criteria, the Council will formally recognise this;
- f. Member States will have the option to submit a new nomination by 30 September 2018 or 2019;
- g. Member States will have the option to request an extension in area, by 30 September 2018 or 2019, as appropriate;
- h. The decision, that the site does not meet the criteria and will therefore no longer be referred to as a biosphere reserve which is part of the Network, will be effective as of the closure of the MAB Council session in 2020.

**7. For BR which have provided a Periodic review report or other appropriate information that has not yet been evaluated by the IACBR and the MAB Council, the Council adopts the following process:**

- a. The Periodic review report/information received will be evaluated by the IACBR and then the MAB ICC in 2018;
- b. Member States will have the option to provide complementary information either before 30 September 2017 or after the evaluation by the IACBR;
- c. The MAB Council will determine in 2018 whether the site meets the criteria;
- d. In the case the biosphere reserve meets the criteria the Council will formally recognise this;

- e. The decision that the site does not meet the criteria and therefore will no longer be referred to as a biosphere reserve which is part of the Network will be effective as of the closure of the MAB Council session in 2020;
- f. In case that the BR does not meet the criteria, its further consideration will be as described in paragraph 6.

8. **For BR which have not provided any Periodic review report which allows evaluation as to whether the BR meets criteria, the MAB Council decides** that the site will no longer be referred to as a biosphere reserve which is part of the Network at the closure of the MAB Council session in 2020, and adopts the following process: the Member State may submit:

- a. a periodic review report by 30 September 2017 which will allow the site to follow the process described in paragraph 7; or
- b. a formal working commitment with an explanation of issues and needs and a detailed workplan and timeline, submitted by 30 September 2017, in order to submit the Periodic Review report at the latest by 30 September 2018 or 2019; or
- c. a new nomination form in conformity with the Statutory Framework of the WNBR at its earliest convenience and before 30 September 2019, to be evaluated in 2020 by the IACBR and then the MAB Council.

9. In cases biosphere reserves cannot meet the criteria, the MAB Council encourages the Member State concerned to withdraw the site under the provisions of paragraph 8 article 9 of the Statutory Framework.

10. With regard to all of these decisions of the Council, the MAB Secretariat will communicate the decision to the appropriate levels of the Member State concerned, with copy to the Permanent Delegation and National UNESCO Commission, within four weeks of the Council decision, specifying the requirements for each concerned Biosphere Reserve. Recipients will be asked to confirm the receipt of the communication.

11. The MAB Council asks the MAB Secretariat to be precise in all communications, when transmitting recommendations, decisions, etc.

12. Furthermore, the MAB Council encourages all Member States, the National MAB Committees and biosphere reserves as well as the Regional Networks to share their experience with periodic review reporting within the WNBR and offer, as appropriate, support to BR in order to meet the criteria.

13. Support to the sites that are not meeting the criteria or have difficulties in reporting the results of their periodic review process are suggested below:



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- 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, UNESCO Centre 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.