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

Thirty-eighth session

Itaipu Biosphere Reserve, Hernandarias, Paraguay

3-6 June 2026

FINAL REPORT

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1. The 38th session of the International Coordination Council of the MAB Programme (MAB-ICC) was held from 3 to 6 June in Hernandarias, Itaipu Biosphere Reserve, Paraguay, at the kind invitation of Paraguay. The MAB-ICC also included two meetings of the MAB Bureau which were conducted in person on 4 and 5 June 2026.

2. A total of 122 participants attended the 38th session, including 28 out of the 34 Members of the MAB Council, as elected by the UNESCO General Conference at its 42nd and 43rd sessions.

3. Observers from the following eight Member States attended the MAB-ICC: Angola, Aruba, Monaco, Paraguay, the Philippines, Sweden, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.

4. The full list of participants is appended to this report under Annex 1.

ITEM 1 – INTRODUCTION BY THE CHAIR OF THE MAB INTERNATIONAL COORDINATING COUNCIL (MAB-ICC)

5. The 38th session of the MAB International Coordinating Council (MAB-ICC) began with a special opening ceremony held on 3 June 2026 at the Itaipu Hydroelectric Dam, Hernandarias, Paraguay. The ceremony brought together high-level dignitaries, including representatives from the Government of Paraguay, UNESCO and the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme, to mark the start of the session and reaffirm their commitment to the objectives of the MAB Programme.

6. The Director-General of ITAIPU Binacional, Mr Justo Zacarías Irún, welcomed the 38th MAB-ICC session to the Itaipu Biosphere Reserve, emphasizing its symbolic importance as a global leader in clean energy and environmental stewardship, where 50 years of sustainable development – rooted in cooperation among nations, environmental well-being and community advancement – have transformed the reservoir into a vital refuge for native biodiversity and a model for harmonizing conservation, production, research and human development. He highlighted ITAIPU's innovations, such as floating solar panels, the concrete actions of the biosphere reserve (including ecological restoration, environmental monitoring and community support) and its active role in nominating a new biosphere reserve in southern Paraguay to expand sustainable opportunities. He also expressed gratitude to UNESCO for the MAB Programme's visionary, integrated approach.

7. Mr Luis Fernando Ramírez, Minister of Education and Sciences and President of the Paraguayan National Commission for UNESCO, highlighted Paraguay's current leadership of the IberoMAB Network and the pending designation of a new biosphere reserve in Alto Paraná. He noted that the hosting of the ICC at Itaipu – the second time in a decade in Latin America – underscores Paraguay's sustained commitment to conservation, education and local development, and emphasized the inseparability of water, energy and education. He offered Itaipu as a global model of socio-environmental management, powering two nations with clean energy, restoring deforested areas and fostering communities in harmony with biodiversity. He also highlighted the importance of the Itaipu Biosphere Reserve as a living classroom that has trained over 1,600 teachers in digital skills (through a UNESCO programme) reaching students nationwide, with the aim of building a generation capable of understanding both natural ecosystems and technological systems.

8. Ms Latifa Yaakoubi, President of the MAB-ICC, emphasized the historical significance of the newly adopted Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (2026–2035), which aligns the MAB Programme with global frameworks such as the Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. She highlighted the 784 biosphere reserves

spread across 142 countries as vital platforms for reconciling biodiversity conservation, sustainable development and local knowledge, and called on ICC members to uphold high governance standards and strengthen the network's capacity to deliver global solutions through local action, while fostering a more harmonious relationship between humanity and nature.

9. Mr Khondker M. Talha, President of the 43rd session of the UNESCO General Conference, commended Paraguay's leadership as host of the 38th MAB-ICC session at Itaipu, a site embodying the MAB Programme's vision of harmonizing sustainable livelihoods with biodiversity conservation. He praised Paraguay's strong commitment to UNESCO and multilateralism, highlighted the Programme's role in creating learning sites where communities, experts and partners collaborate across its 784 biosphere reserves to address environmental crises, and urged Member States to raise awareness of its underutilized potential as a people-centred, science-based solution for balancing human development with planetary realities, stressing that humanity's future lies in cooperation and shared responsibility with nature.

10. Ms Åsa Regnér, Deputy Director-General of UNESCO, delivered remarks on behalf of the Director-General, expressing gratitude to the Government of Paraguay and ITAIPU Binacional for hosting the session. She highlighted the alignment between the MAB Programme's 784 biosphere reserves and UNESCO's vision of a 'UNESCO for the People', emphasizing the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (2026–2035) as a roadmap for transforming ambition into implementation. Ms Regnér underscored the three pillars of the MAB Programme – science, education and community participation – citing the Itaipu Biosphere Reserve as an example of integrating scientific monitoring, environmental education and inclusive community engagement, including Indigenous knowledge. She stressed the need for sustainable financing and reaffirmed UNESCO's commitment to supporting Member States in accessing new funding mechanisms, while calling for a productive and impactful session to shape the future of the MAB Programme.

11. Mr Rolando de Barros Barreto, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development of Paraguay, welcomed participants to Paraguay, emphasizing the symbiosis between humans and nature and the shared responsibility to address environmental challenges. He highlighted Paraguay's proactive role in offering concrete solutions through its rich mosaic of ecoregions – a natural heritage transcending borders – and underscored the vital role of Indigenous Peoples as custodians of ancestral knowledge, a strategic national asset for the future. He reaffirmed Paraguay's commitment to the MAB Programme through three biosphere reserves, where communities build well-being, and proudly announced progress toward a fourth biosphere reserve, reflecting the country's unlimited environmental ambition. He stressed that 'Paraguay is water' – a national identity defining sovereignty and powering some of the world's cleanest energy – and emphasized the importance of international coordination, thanking UNESCO for its trust. He concluded that protecting nature is both a moral duty and a strategic investment in securing the future of new generations.

12. Mr Rubén Ramírez Lezcano, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Paraguay, highlighted UNESCO as a model of cooperation that has successfully articulated science, international collaboration and public policies to foster a more balanced relationship between people and nature, underlining the importance of the MAB Programme as one of the Organization's most valuable initiatives. He emphasized that environmental challenges require responses grounded in dialogue, science and collective action – not fragmented or sectoral approaches – and noted that platforms like the ICC are essential for exchanging solutions and delivering tangible results, especially in an increasingly complex international context. He pointed to Itaipu as a concrete example of harmonizing development with responsible natural resource use, reaffirmed Paraguay's commitment to environmental protection, sustainable development and multilateralism, and

expressed hope that the session would strengthen cooperation and produce shared solutions benefiting societies worldwide.

13. The ceremony concluded with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between UNESCO and ITAIPU Binacional, formalizing their collaboration in support of the MAB Programme and sustainable development initiatives in the region. Following the signing, Mr Santiago Peña Palacios, President of the Republic of Paraguay, delivered his closing remarks, welcoming the 38th MAB-ICC to Itaipu, a site of potential conflict that became a symbol of cooperation and clean energy, and expressed pride in hosting a meeting emblematic of this trust. He emphasized Paraguay's worldview, wherein nature is a living, nurturing mother to which humans play an integral role, and highlighted the country's bilingual identity, Indigenous knowledge and biosphere reserves, which currently number three with a fourth nomination underway. He reaffirmed that environmental protection and human development must advance together through science, education and culture, caring for both the Earth and its people. The event culminated with a cultural performance followed by the taking of a group photograph of the meeting participants.

ITEM 2 – OPENING REMARKS BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF UNESCO

14. This item was addressed under Item 1 (Opening of the Session).

ITEM 3 – REPORT BY MS LATIFA YAAKOUBI, CHAIR OF THE MAB-ICC

15. Ms Latifa Yaakoubi, in her capacity as Chair of the MAB International Coordinating Council (MAB-ICC), presented the report of the Bureau for the period following the 37th session of the MAB-ICC, held in Lin'an, Hangzhou, China (26–28 September 2025). The Bureau held multiple meetings during this period, including a remote meeting on 12 May 2026 to review preparations for the 38th session and several gatherings within the 37th session to validate key agenda items, such as the list of new biosphere reserves and the MAB Young Scientists Awards.

16. Ms Yaakoubi described the 37th session as a landmark event, attended by 282 participants from 29 Member States and 68 observers, marking a turning point for the MAB Programme. The session adopted the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (2026–2035), a 10-year roadmap developed through inclusive consultations involving over 60 per cent of Member States. The Plan is structured around three objectives: (i) contributing to multilateral environmental agreements, (ii) strengthening human and financial resources, and (iii) advancing research, knowledge and innovation. It also integrates rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability in progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

17. The 37th session also emphasized youth engagement as a cornerstone of the Programme, with 43 per cent of Member States having designated National MAB Youth Focal Points and the 3rd Global MAB Youth Forum held in Italy in May 2026. The session celebrated scientific excellence, awarding the Michel Batisse Prize to Mr Shu Zhufei (China) for his innovative wildlife monitoring work in the Chebaling Biosphere Reserve, which has led to the identification of 108 new vertebrate species since 2014. Additionally, 11 MAB Young Scientists Awards were granted, including five Prince Albert I of Monaco Awards focused on marine and coastal research. The session also approved a new thematic network, 'People for Living Waters', dedicated to freshwater ecosystems.

18. The 37th session advanced the digitization of MAB statutory processes, with nearly 3,000 documents now accessible online through the UNESCO Sites Navigator, and launched an early warning system to monitor threats such as fires and deforestation in biosphere reserves. The World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) was expanded to 784 sites in 142 countries, including 24 transboundary reserves, following the approval of 26 new designations from a record 34 proposals submitted. The Process of Excellence continued to ensure the quality and compliance of the network, with 71 periodic reviews examined during the session.

19. The 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves (22–25 September 2025, Hangzhou) represented a historic milestone for the Programme, gathering together over 4,000 participants from 150 countries under the theme 'Shaping a Sustainable Future for People and Nature'. The Congress adopted two foundational documents: the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (2026–2035), which aligns the MAB Programme with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) and the 2030 Agenda, and the Hangzhou Declaration, a high-level political statement reaffirming the role of biosphere reserves as learning platforms for sustainable development and calling for the integration of Indigenous Peoples, women and youth in governance processes.

ITEM 4 – ELECTION OF THE NEW BUREAU MEMBERS OF THE MAB-ICC

20. The meeting then proceeded with the election of new members of the Bureau and a new Chair for the coming two years.

21. The Secretariat presented the received nominations. As no other candidates were received, the composition of the Bureau was approved by acclamation.

22. The new composition of the MAB Council's Bureau is as follows:

Chair: M. Keping Ma, China (Group IV)

Vice-chairs:

- Italy (Group I)
- Lithuania (Group II)
- Costa Rica (Group III), also serving as the Rapporteur
- Zambia (Group V-A)
- Morocco (Group V-B).

23. The newly elected Bureau Chair, M. Keping Ma, expressed deep gratitude to UNESCO, the Member States of the ICC, and the Secretariat for their trust and strong support. He paid tribute to Ms Latifa Yaakoubi for her dedication and contributions to the ICC's work over the past two years, and looked forward to collaborating with all stakeholders, guided by the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan, to advance science-based approaches that support sustainable development within the MAB Programme framework.

ITEM 5 – ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND TIMETABLE

24. The Chair asked the Council members whether they had any amendments to propose before adopting the agenda and timetable for the session.

DECISION:

25. **Without further comments or suggestions, the agenda and timetable were adopted without the addition of new items (see Adopted Agenda in Annex 2).**

ITEM 6 – REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF THE MAB PROGRAMME

26. Mr Antonio Abreu, in his capacity as Secretary of the MAB Programme, welcomed the participants to the 38th session of the MAB-ICC and presented his report, highlighting the progress made since the 37th session of the MAB-ICC, held in Lin'an, Hangzhou, China (September 2025). He noted that the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) now encompasses 784 sites in 142 Member States, including 25 transboundary sites, following the approval of 26 new biosphere reserves and 5 extensions/modifications at the 37th session. Six new Member States – Angola, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Iceland, Oman and Tajikistan – joined the WNBR, resulting in one of the largest expansions in the Programme's history. The WNBR now covers 5.5 per cent of the Earth's terrestrial surface, with core areas under strict protection equivalent to an area larger than Peru, and benefits 450 million people living in and around biosphere reserves. The Secretary underscored the Programme's growing relevance, as evidenced by the record participation at the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves and the adoption of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (2026–2035), which now guides the actions of the MAB Programme for the decade ahead.

27. The Secretary reported on the implementation of the Process of Excellence, approved in 2021 to ensure that biosphere reserves uphold the standards of the WNBR's Statutory Framework. At its 32nd meeting (February 2026), the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves (IACBR) reviewed 17 new nominations, 5 extension/modification requests, 34 periodic reviews and 26 follow-up submissions from 35 countries. The Secretariat continued to support Member States in fulfilling statutory obligations, including through reminder letters and updated lists of sites required to submit periodic reviews. The Secretary also announced the development of a dedicated monitoring and evaluation framework for the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan, with initial results to be presented at this session.

28. The Secretary outlined significant advances in the digitization of MAB processes and data, including the operationalization of the Statutory Submission Platform in early 2026. Developed with extensive testing by biosphere reserves from Argentina, Canada, Costa Rica, Denmark, Germany, Japan, Portugal and the Republic of Korea, the platform provides a unified system for preparing, submitting and reviewing nominations and periodic reviews. Voluntary use began in 2026, with mandatory adoption foreseen from September 2027. The Secretariat also finalized the Biosphere Reserves and UNESCO Global Geoparks Resource Hub, expanding the former Biodiversity Portal into a comprehensive data and knowledge platform with enhanced features, such as document libraries, contact directories and advanced search tools. The Resource Hub aligns with UNESCO's Open Science principles and supports research, policy-making and resource mobilization, while allowing Member States to validate and manage site-related information before public release. Both platforms were demonstrated at this session.

29. Complementary digital developments included training programmes to support Member States in the use of new tools, the refinement of a GIS-based alert system for monitoring threats to sites accessible via the UNESCO Sites Navigator, and the establishment of an ICC decision tracker. The Secretariat also advanced discussions on data-sharing arrangements with international partners (e.g. UNEP-WCMC) and proposed revisions to periodic review processes to streamline reporting and align with evolving priorities. The Secretary emphasized that these investments aim to meet growing demands from Member States and align MAB with UNESCO's integration, communication and efficiency goals. However, he noted that sustained technical and financial resources, as

well as continued engagement from Member States, are required to ensure the long-term effectiveness and scalability of the Programme's digital infrastructure.

30. The Secretary presented a report on the Programme's budget, which is determined by the UNESCO General Conference and Executive Board. The C5 biennium budget is funded primarily through a limited regular budget, which is insufficient to cover the costs of annual statutory meetings; however, Member States have generously hosted ICC meetings including in China, Morocco and Paraguay, covering administrative expenses. Additional financial resources are sourced from three lines: voluntary contributions from Member States or other entities for specific initiatives, thematic or regional works; additional contributions with different allocation mechanisms; and a special account through which Member States or donors can provide funds directly to programme management. He noted that the stability of these resources varies, with some contributions spanning multiple years (e.g. Spain's annual contribution of €180,000 for IberoMAB activities, Belgium/Flanders' regular contributions supporting major projects in Africa such as Yangambi and the Volkswagen Foundation) and others limited to single activities (e.g. contributions from China for the Congress, and private sector partners such as Guerlain within the LVMH partnership, and Vivo, which promotes youth engagement and storytelling in biosphere reserves). Furthermore, the Secretariat collaborates with Member States to apply for external funding opportunities, including the Kunming Biodiversity Fund (KBF), and has positioned the MAB Programme to access such resources. The Secretary provided a QR code linking to the UNESCO Transparency and Accountability Hub, which offers detailed information on individual projects, noting that provision of a precise and definitive MAB budget may not be feasible.

31. The Secretary highlighted progress in youth engagement, a priority for the MAB Programme. Following the 2022 decision to establish an Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on Youth Involvement, the Secretariat implemented its recommendations, including the appointment of a dedicated Youth Focal Point at the Secretariat and a call for Member States to designate National MAB Youth Focal Points. As of April 2026, 60.1 per cent of Member States had confirmed their national focal points. Youth were actively involved in drafting the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan, with two MAB Youth leaders participating in the drafting group. A global mapping survey (November–December 2025) assessed youth activities across the network, identifying challenges, opportunities and priorities for strengthening engagement.

32. The 3rd Global MAB Youth Forum was held in the Po Delta Biosphere Reserve, Italy (18–22 May 2026), under the theme 'Committed to the Future We Want', and was attended by over 150 youth participants (ages 18–35) from across the WNBR. The Forum produced a MAB Youth Declaration and a MAB Youth Roadmap, both aligned with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan. It also identified strategies to integrate youth into MAB governance structures, decision-making processes and the daily actions of biosphere reserves. This meeting represented the first global gathering of the newly designated National MAB Youth Focal Points, marking a significant step toward formalizing youth representation in the Programme.

33. The Secretary reported on new partnerships and fundraising, which saw significant growth in 2025–2026. The Government of Germany's International Climate Initiative (IKI) approved a €8.4 million project over five years to support mangrove, coral and seagrass restoration and conservation in Colombian and Mexican biosphere reserves, the largest single project in the MAB Programme's history. Under the Kunming Biodiversity Fund's first call for catalytic projects, UNESCO led three initiatives totalling USD 800,000: enhancing ecological connectivity in the Trifinio-Fraternidad Transboundary Biosphere Reserve (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras), integrating Indigenous and local knowledge into biodiversity policies in Malawi, Namibia, and Trinidad and Tobago, and strengthening community engagement for biodiversity conservation in Nepal's Kanchenjunga Conservation Area. All three projects were completed on time with

tangible outcomes, demonstrating MAB's effectiveness as compared with other UN agencies.

34. The Secretary highlighted the launch of the UNESCO Soil Initiative following the 2024 conference 'Rooted in Resilience: Unearthing the Importance of Soil in Sustainable Development', held on 1 July 2024in Agadir, Morocco. In 2025, the initiative defined its thematic priorities, built partnerships and began activities, including the 'Rooted in Resilience II' meeting, held in the Schelde Delta UNESCO Global Geopark (August 2025), which established a technical advisory group and soil sentinel network of biosphere reserves and Global Geoparks. The EU Horizon Europe project 'UNES-Soil' (2026–2027), with a budget of €2.8 million, was included in the EU workplan to introduce the Soil Sentinel approach, mobilizing UNESCO-designated sites to improve soil resilience through science, literacy and Indigenous knowledge. The proposal is currently under review by the European Union.

35. The MAB Programme expanded its private sector collaborations, with two projects totalling USD 1.8 million approved by the Volkswagen Foundation to support mangrove restoration (Brazil, Mexico and Peru) and ecological connectivity (Brazil, Indonesia, Zambia). The Amazonia project (USD 5 million) and Women for Bees (USD 1.5 million), funded by Louis Vuitton Moet Hennessy (LVMH) and Guerlain, were completed with significant achievements over five years, and Phase 2 of the Women for Bees project is in the final stages of approval. Additionally, a USD 60,000 Dior-funded project supported sustainable development for local and Indigenous communities linked to the Monarch butterfly in Mexico, with a second phase under discussion. A new USD 220,000 project funded by Vivo focuses on youth capacity-building through digital literacy, creativity and awareness in biosphere reserves, with an initial focus on Egypt, Italy and Malaysia.

36. The Secretary presented global actions undertaken through UNESCO's field office network, which reported a strong portfolio of operational projects in biosphere reserves, emphasizing climate adaptation, sustainable livelihoods and governance. The UNESCO Office in Nairobi played a key role in mobilizing resources for the EU-funded ALBATROSS project, where UNESCO leads components on multi-level dialogue, knowledge transfer and nature-based solutions in biosphere reserves across Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, the United Republic of Tanzania and South Africa, benefiting 50,000–70,000 people. The Office also advanced a major agroecology initiative in the Mt Elgon Transboundary Biosphere Reserve (Kenya and Uganda), directly benefiting up to 20,000 community members through participatory research and community-led approaches. The UNESCO Office in New Delhi implemented targeted initiatives to strengthen women-led sustainable livelihoods in Indian biosphere reserves, including support for 50 women in sustainable beekeeping (Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve) and 60 women in circular economy activities (Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve), linking income generation with biodiversity conservation and pollution reduction.

37. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the UNESCO Offices in Montevideo and Lima reported sustained engagement combining long-term investment and targeted interventions. In Paraguay, over 500 Indigenous and rural young women graduated from the Mbaracayú Educational Centre in the Mbaracayú Biosphere Reserve, improving livelihoods and leadership opportunities. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, projects in the Beni and Pilón Lajas Biosphere Reserves strengthened agroforestry systems, local value chains and fire resilience through community brigades and equipment provision. In Peru, the Women for Bees initiative in the Oxapampa-Asháninka-Yánesha Biosphere Reserve supported 74 women through training and enterprise development, while the Amazonia Project reinforced governance, local economic development and participatory planning across multiple biosphere reserves. The Offices also advanced a bilingual pedagogical guide on Education for Sustainable Development for UNESCO-designated coastal and island sites, building on experience from the Archipelago de Juan Fernández Biosphere Reserve (Chile).

38. The UNESCO Offices in Apia, Kathmandu and New Delhi provided targeted support for biosphere reserve processes, including nominations and periodic reviews. The Office in Apia facilitated technical and financial assistance for periodic reviews in the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau. In South Asia, the Office in New Delhi facilitated transboundary cooperation between India and Nepal through knowledge exchange on the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve, while the Office in Kathmandu supported preparatory work for the nomination of the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area as a biosphere reserve, with funding secured and technical groundwork underway.

39. In Africa and the Arab Region, activities focused on linking biosphere reserves to broader development and humanitarian frameworks. The UNESCO Office in Khartoum supported projects in the Dinder Biosphere Reserve to enhance food security in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and facilitated the installation of a solar-powered desalination plant among other innovative infrastructure in coastal biosphere reserves, while coordinating humanitarian assistance in marine protected areas. These interventions demonstrate the role of biosphere reserves in crisis response, resilience-building and service provision in fragile contexts. The UNESCO Office in Jakarta supported the Southeast Asian Biosphere Reserves Network (SeaBRnet), which engaged with over 400 stakeholders across multiple countries in training and strategic planning aligned with the MAB Strategy 2026–2035, while strengthening regional cooperation and youth engagement through Japanese Funds-in-Trust (JFIT).

40. The Secretariat, in coordination with the field office network, monitored the situation of biosphere reserves in conflict or disaster-affected areas, focusing on medium- and long-term monitoring, capacity-building and restoration once conditions allow. The Secretary called for solidarity and cooperation among biosphere reserves, regional and thematic networks, UNESCO Chairs and Category 2 Centres to support actions in these contexts.

41. The Secretary underscored MAB's contributions to global processes and programmes, including its role as the UNESCO's focal point for biodiversity and its close collaboration with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Future Earth. MAB is co-leading, with the Education Sector and CBD, the development of the Global Plan of Action on Education for Biodiversity, expected to be adopted at CBD COP17 in Armenia (October 2026). As part of this effort, MAB co-organized with IPBES and hosted the First Authors Meeting for the Second Global Assessment at UNESCO Headquarters in November 2025, reinforcing its commitment to strengthening the science–policy interface.

42. The Secretary reported on the consolidation of regional and thematic networks, which play a key role in scaling impact through coordination, capacity-building and externally funded programmes. The WNBR includes regional networks such as the Pacific Biosphere Reserve Network (PacMAB), the South and Central Asia MAB Network (SACAM), the Southeast Asian Biosphere Reserve Network (SeaBRnet), the East Asian Biosphere Reserve Network (EABRN), EuroMAB, NordMAB, the African Biosphere Reserves Network (AfriMAB), ArabMAB, the Ibero-American MAB Network (IberoMAB), and a growing number of thematic networks, including those focused on islands and coastal areas, mountains and caves. The 37th MAB-ICC session welcomed the 'People for Living Waters' Thematic Network, which aims to strengthen the protection and sustainable management of inland aquatic ecosystems (rivers, wetlands and lakes) by fostering cooperation, knowledge exchange and joint research. The network addresses challenges such as water quality, biodiversity loss, climate change impacts and competing water uses, while promoting nature-based solutions and participatory governance.

43. The Secretary noted the continued consolidation of the Network of Biosphere Reserves in Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP-MAB), which held its 4th meeting in March 2026 at the Cerrado Biosphere Reserve (Brazil). The meeting approved the network's Action Plan and elected its management bodies, led by the Cerrado Biosphere Reserve (Brazil) and Quiçama Biosphere Reserve (Angola). The 5th meeting is scheduled to be held in Angola in 2027.

44. The Secretary provided an update on MAB Awards, noting that the MAB Young Scientists Award Scheme has received support from the Principality of Monaco since 2022, enabling the creation of five additional annual fellowships for studies on marine, island and coastal issues in biosphere reserves. In 2024, these awards were formally named the 'MAB Young Scientists Award – Prince Albert I of Monaco', commemorating the 100th anniversary of Prince Albert I and supporting the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. The call for 2026 submissions was open until 7 May 2026.

45. The Secretary also reported on cooperation with Category 2 Institutes and Centres under the auspices of UNESCO, which continues to strengthen. The HIST Category 2 Centre (China) contributed climate modelling projections for 2050 and 2100, assessing the impacts of extreme climate events on biosphere reserves and other UNESCO sites, supporting evidence-based policies and conservation investments. The Regional Post-graduate Training School on Integrated Management of Tropical Forests and Lands (ERAIFT, Democratic Republic of the Congo) is a partner in the Yangambi Biosphere Reserve Climate-Biodiversity Centre of Excellence project, currently in its second phase, managed by the UNESCO Office in Kinshasa and funded by the Government of Belgium.

46. The International Centre for Capacity Development, Sustainability and Societal Change (GRÓ, Iceland) offers a six-month Land Restoration Training Programme (LRT) for fellows from African biosphere reserves. The most recent intake included four MAB Fellows from Cameroon, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Zimbabwe, strengthening capacities in ecosystem restoration and sustainable land management and directly supporting the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

47. The Secretary highlighted communication, publications and awareness-raising as structural components of the MAB Programme. The Secretariat maintains an active online presence and ensures visibility through UNESCO's main channels. The International Day for Biosphere Reserves (3 November) was observed globally, with over 100 biosphere reserves hosting events such as forums, tree-planting, school activities and youth gatherings, reinforcing public outreach and community engagement.

48. Coverage of the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves by the International Institute for Sustainable Development's Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB) represented a significant milestone, placing MAB within the same reporting ecosystem as major global environmental negotiations. ENB provided daily reports, images and a comprehensive summary, reaching policy-makers, negotiators and researchers, and emphasizing the role of biosphere reserves in addressing biodiversity loss, climate change and sustainable development. The inclusion of the MAB significantly enhanced the Programme's visibility and policy relevance.

49. On 21 April 2026, UNESCO published the seminal report *People and Nature in UNESCO-designated Sites*, a joint effort of the Secretariats of MAB, the International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme (IGGP) and the World Heritage Convention. The report highlights the critical role of biosphere reserves and other UNESCO sites in balancing biodiversity conservation with sustainable development, demonstrating their effectiveness in supporting biodiversity protection, climate resilience, sustainable livelihoods and inclusive governance. It also draws attention to persistent gaps in financing, capacity and visibility, and calls for increased investment in UNESCO-designated sites as cost-effective platforms for achieving global environmental and

development goals. The Secretary urged the MAB family – including ICC members, biosphere reserve managers, National MAB Committees and UNESCO National Commissions – to raise awareness and advocate for strengthened investment in the Programme.

50. The Secretary concluded by emphasizing the growing relevance of MAB's tangible approach to conservation and sustainable development, as evidenced by the record expansion of the WNBR and the success of the 5th World Congress. He noted that while new extrabudgetary partnerships and projects have been launched, resource constraints persist, which have been overcome only by the dedication of MAB Secretariat staff in Headquarters and field offices. He called for greater efforts to mobilize financial and technical resources, including through professional secondments, Junior Professional Officer (JPO) positions and enhanced support from UNESCO Chairs and Category 2 Centres.

51. The Secretary stressed that biosphere reserves and the WNBR will play a critical role in implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework by enhancing biodiversity conservation, monitoring global progress and showcasing sustainable approaches to address biodiversity loss, climate change and human development. He reaffirmed the point that youth are essential to MAB's future and called for a more proactive communication strategy using innovative technologies to engage with the public.

52. The Secretary expressed confidence that, with the support of the MAB family – including National Committees, scientists, practitioners, biosphere reserve managers, local authorities, communities, UNESCO Chairs, Category 2 Centres and the private sector – MAB will continue to be one of UNESCO's and the UN system's most inspiring programmes. He thanked the MAB Council for its continuous support and guidance.

53. France thanked Paraguay for its hospitality, congratulated the new Bureau and ICC Chair, including for his role as co-chair of the drafting working group, and expressed its appreciation for the Secretariat's work. France welcomed the fundraising efforts and endorsed the Secretariat's particular attention to biosphere reserves in conflict zones. It emphasized the need for greater transparency, requesting that internet links to explanatory documents be included in reports to better track ongoing projects. France proposed several recommendations: (i) operationalizing and communicating the alert procedure for biosphere reserves affected by harmful projects, particularly in core areas; (ii) renewing the ICC's request to the Secretariat to present at each ICC session an update on the implementation of previous ICC decisions, identifying opportunities, challenges and constraints where appropriate; (iii) providing regular updates on the implementation of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (HSAP); (iv) incorporating financial and performance reports (including private sector contributions) in pre-session documents; and (v) updating the technical guidelines in English and French and making them easily accessible on the MAB website. France recalled that it has engaged in discussions with UNESCO regarding experiments it is conducting on its territory, including those related to biosphere reserves on the topic of biodiversity or nature credits and certificates. France asked how the Secretariat plans to address this essential issue linked to private financial support of biosphere reserves, and how it intends to incorporate the experiences and lessons learned by the National MAB Committees.

54. Canada thanked Paraguay for its hospitality, Ms Latifa Yaakoubi for her leadership and congratulated the new Chair, while expressing gratitude to the MAB Secretariat. Canada expressed its pleasure at returning to the MAB Council after a 27-year absence. Canada highlighted its historical engagement with the MAB Programme, noting it was an early supporter with a seat on the ICC in 1977 and its first biosphere reserve designated in 1978. Canada also noted that the Programme has had an immense impact in Canada,

with multiple biosphere reserves serving as practical tools on the ground to fulfil UNESCO's mandate.

55. Mali congratulated the Chair on his election and the Bureau members, and expressed its gratitude to Paraguay for hosting the Council. Mali commended the Secretariat on the quality of its report and welcomed the inscription of 26 new biosphere reserves, expressing appreciation to China for its efforts. Mali highlighted the importance of the digital transformation of the MAB Programme, which will facilitate access to data, and welcomed the completion of the new platform as well as the training programmes designed to help Member States access and use digital tools. Mali reported that it initiated the process to create two new biosphere reserves three years ago and has launched a project to restore the continuity of biosphere reserves, contributing to biodiversity conservation by involving and encouraging populations to restore ecological corridors. Mali reaffirmed its commitment to cooperation with UNESCO.

56. Italy thanked the organizers in Paraguay for their hospitality, congratulated the Chair on his election and expressed pride in being back in the Bureau, thanking the Secretariat for its efforts. Italy also underscored the adequacy of the measures undertaken for the digitalization of the Programme and encouraged the Secretariat to continue on this path. It also underlined the success and momentum of the MAB Youth Forum and invited Member States to host the next forum. Lastly, Italy appreciated the recent progress made in regard to the financial framework, acknowledging the difficulties created by cross-sectoral work and financial constraints. It also suggested closer collaborations with UNESCO Chairs and efforts to identify in-kind contributions to strengthen programmes on the ground.

57. Azerbaijan thanked the Government and people of Paraguay for the organization of the session and their hospitality. Azerbaijan congratulated the Chair and the Bureau members on their election and thanked the previous Chair and the Secretariat for its presentation. Azerbaijan affirmed its commitment to the objectives of the MAB Programme, underlining the value of biosphere reserves as laboratories for sustainable development. Azerbaijan mentioned recent national efforts, including hosting COP29, and welcomed the implementation of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan and the importance of biosphere reserves for the implementation of global frameworks. Azerbaijan also appreciated and supported the work on youth and the progress made on digitalization.

58. Bangladesh congratulated the Chair on his election and expressed its gratitude to the former Chair. Bangladesh also expressed its gratitude to the Government of Paraguay for its hospitality and the MAB Secretariat for its work, commending the Secretariat on advancing programmatic action guided by the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan and the ongoing efforts to digitalize MAB processes. Bangladesh stated its appreciation for the upcoming operationalization of the data and knowledge platform, noting the potential to enhance efficiency, transparency and coordination among Member States. The country also expressed its pleasure at the progress in establishing MAB Youth Networks and the nomination of Youth Focal Points, encouraging the Secretariat to actively promote their activities. Bangladesh also appreciated the inclusion of two young people in the drafting group. Bangladesh thanked the Secretariat for maintaining partnerships and a funders network over the past years, congratulated Member States whose biosphere reserves would be approved later in the session and thanked the IACBR for their technical and scientific advice.

59. The Republic of Korea expressed sincere gratitude to Paraguay for its generous support in organizing the 38th ICC and offered its congratulation to the Chair. It noted UNESCO's difficult financial situation and commended the MAB Secretariat for its excellent work under current human resource constraints. The Republic of Korea noted that the International Day of Biosphere Reserves represents a good opportunity to raise

awareness about the importance of these sites. The delegation further noted that recent EABRN online celebrations involved many youth activists and anticipated continuing and expanding upon these initiatives.

60. Japan expressed its appreciation to the Government of Paraguay for its efforts in hosting the session, congratulated the new Chair and thanked the MAB Secretariat for its ongoing work to advance the Programme. Japan informed the meeting of recent celebrations of the 75th anniversary of UNESCO membership, which involved enhanced promotion of UNESCO sites, including biosphere reserves, for education and tourism. On 20 May, Japan organized a forum at the United Nations University in Tokyo to commemorate this anniversary, which was attended by the UNESCO Director-General. Japan expressed a strong interest in the operation of the newly introduced document submission platform and expressed its hope that the platform will simplify the submission process. Japan finished by reaffirming its continued commitment to and support for the MAB Programme.

61. Togo expressed its gratitude to Paraguay for hosting the session, welcomed the Secretariat's report and offered its congratulations to the Chair on his election. The country stated that its two biosphere reserves embody the spirit of the MAB Programme, balancing conservation and biodiversity, but noted persistent challenges, including land pressures, resource exploitation, and the degradation of mangroves and savannahs. Togo encouraged the Secretariat to continue and amplify its work on the follow-up and monitoring of African biosphere reserves, adapted to national contexts. Togo affirmed its support for the work of the Secretariat and encouraged the use of innovative financing mechanisms, such as multi-country partnerships.

62. Austria congratulated the Chair on his election, offered its gratitude to Paraguay for its hospitality, and thanked the new Bureau members and the Secretariat. Austria offered its appreciation for the presentation of the report, and raised a point in support of France, suggesting that future reporting under the alert system should identify ways to integrate threats, controversies and dangers to biosphere reserves, even when not based on natural disasters. Austria noted that the procedure could be similar to that used in other red-listing situations and would help avoid gap between periodic reviews. Austria encouraged openness in addressing such issues.

63. Brazil expressed its appreciation to Paraguay for hosting the ICC, and offered its congratulations to the Bureau members and to China for the election of the new Chair. Brazil explained that the current session marks its return to the Council after more than 30 years, and noted that it has the largest continental network of biosphere reserves in the world. Brazil congratulated the Secretariat on the work presented in the report and looks forward to implementation of the planned actions.

64. China congratulated the Chair on his election and expressed its appreciation to Paraguay for its warm hospitality. China stated that the MAB Programme has entered a new stage of development, following the adoption of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (HSAP). The country commended the Secretariat, the ICC, the Bureau and Member States for advancing implementation of the HSAP. China noted significant progress in translating the HSAP into concrete actions, including strengthening the WNBR, enhancing capacity-building, advancing digital transformation, and establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation framework, all of which demonstrate the vitality of the MAB Programme. China expressed its hope that the MAB Programme will continue to play a leading role in addressing global challenges and that biosphere reserves will further serve as living laboratories. China encouraged stronger cooperation among Member States and increased support for developing countries. China reaffirmed its commitment to the future development of the MAB Programme.

65. Sudan congratulated the Chair and extended its full support to the new Bureau, expressing gratitude to the Secretariat and to Paraguay for hosting the session. Sudan thanked the Secretary for his report, noting in particular the US$16.5 million in funds raised. Sudan urged that the deployment of these resources be guided by equity, urging the Secretariat and funders to establish rapid access pipelines to ensure that local teams receive systematic support and are adequately equipped. Sudan called for the prioritization of sites in conflict situations and stressed that biodiversity protection should not be limited to stable environments.

66. Colombia thanked Paraguay, the Chair and the Secretariat for its report. The country stressed the importance of digitalization for the work of the MAB Programme and congratulated the Secretariat on this initiative, noting that it will facilitate the preparation of periodic review reports, annual reporting and real-time monitoring of activities in reserves, particularly in Latin America. Colombia highlighted the need to review overlapping UNESCO designations, such as biosphere reserves, Geoparks and World Heritage Sites, and emphasized the importance of evaluating the natural and cultural aspects of these designations. Colombia also emphasized the importance of transboundary biosphere reserves. The country further noted the importance of branding for biosphere reserves, especially in Latin America, where it adds significant commercial value to the sites. Lastly, Colombia highlighted the need for support geared towards adaptation and hazard management in the context of climate change.

67. Portugal thanked Paraguay for its warm welcome, noting its cultural wealth and biodiversity, and expressed its gratitude to the Chair, the outgoing Chair and to Morocco for hosting the previous ICC in Agadir. Portugal thanked the Secretariat, noting that it is now better equipped with tools such as the digital platform to respond to challenges, and stated that the role of the MAB Programme has never been more relevant. Portugal affirmed its commitment to strengthen activities, capacity-building and network activities, and expressed its confidence that, under the guidance of the new Chair, the Programme will continue to grow in impact and relevance.

68. The MAB Secretary thanked all delegates for their interventions. The Secretary noted that some points raised by Member States are linked to capacity and funds, and explained that the digitalization process was achieved with regular funds. The Secretary emphasized that the MAB Programme, Geoparks, World Heritage and education are all governed by the same Member States and therefore require an integrated approach. Regarding new financial instruments to support biodiversity conservation, such as biodiversity credits and nature certificates, the Secretary stated that these should be addressed under an integrated approach and that UNESCO is working on a position. The Secretary noted that biodiversity credits are more complex than carbon credits, as they involve measuring species rather than CO_2. The Secretary also emphasized that UNESCO does not own assets, but can provide transparency, expertise and monitoring. The Secretary acknowledged that comments around monitoring and digitalization are limited by capacity and resources.

DECISION:

69. **The MAB-ICC welcomed the Secretary's report and the progress achieved and encouraged the Secretariat to continue its efforts to place the MAB Programme at the centre of UNESCO's biodiversity and sustainable development agenda, to raise its international profile, and to increase funding and partnerships. The MAB-ICC requested that internet links to explanatory documents be incorporated into the Secretary's report for actions, projects or initiatives mentioned. The MAB-ICC also requested the Secretariat to update the technical guidelines based on the recommendations made during ICC meetings and to make these documents easily accessible on the MAB Programme website.**

ITEM 7 – MAB CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE KUNMING-MONTREAL GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK (KMGBF)

70. The Secretariat reported on the MAB Programme's continued contributions to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), explaining that the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (2026–2035) explicitly supports implementation of the KMGBF. The Plan positions biosphere reserves as platforms for locally driven, rights-based and culturally anchored conservation, ecosystem restoration, climate mitigation and adaptation, sustainable economic transitions, inclusive governance and knowledge-sharing, with a focus on Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), women and youth. The Secretariat further noted that the proposed monitoring and evaluation systems of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (SAP) will align WNBR reporting with KMGBF processes, thereby linking biosphere reserve performance to national biodiversity reporting.

71. The Secretariat outlined MAB's active engagement in global biodiversity processes, including participation in the 7th meeting of the CBD's Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI-7) and the 12th session of the IPBES Plenary, as well as the organization of the first author meeting for the second IPBES Global Assessment at UNESCO headquarters. UNESCO, with MAB as its focal point for biodiversity, is leading the development of the Global Action Plan for Education on Biodiversity under the KMGBF, in collaboration with IPBES, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the CBD Secretariat. Biosphere reserves serve as critical learning sites for biodiversity education, supporting KMGBF implementation by integrating conservation, research and education. The Secretariat will co-organize side events with the CBD Secretariat at SBI-8 and COP17 to highlight these contributions.

72. The Secretariat also reported on the UNESCO Soil Initiative, led by the MAB Programme in partnership with FAO's Global Soil Partnership, the European Union (EU) Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe' (Mission Soil) and the Center for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF), which advanced the establishment of a global 'soil sentinel' network of biosphere reserves and Global Geoparks. The initiative positions soils as foundational for ecosystem health and human well-being, contributing directly to the KMGBF by advancing nature-based solutions, ecosystem and climate resilience, and locally managed landscape conservation. To enhance internal coordination, the Secretariat launched the Global Biodiversity Governance Brief, a quarterly update to support a more integrated, multisectoral approach to biodiversity governance.

73. The Secretariat drew attention to the April 2026 UNESCO flagship publication *People and Nature in UNESCO-designated Sites*, which serves as an evidence base demonstrating the measurable contributions of biosphere reserves and other UNESCO sites to global biodiversity goals. The report shows that biodiversity within these sites remains comparatively stable despite global decline and highlights their role as hubs for community-based conservation, Indigenous knowledge and sustainable development. Around 50 per cent of post-COP15 National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) reference UNESCO or its sites, while over 80 per cent of the latest national reports (6th National Reports) submitted to the CBD highlight their contributions to biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and monitoring.

74. At the field level, the Secretariat reported that MAB has expanded its portfolio of projects supporting KMGBF Targets 2 (Ecosystem Restoration), 3 (Conservation and Protected Areas), 11 (Nature Contributions to People) and 19 (Resource Mobilization). Partnerships were strengthened with existing collaborators, including the Government of Flanders (Belgium), Spain's Autonomous Organism of National Parks (OAPN),

Volkswagen, Dior, LVMH and Guerlain, while new partnerships with the German International Climate Initiative (IKI) and Vivo enabled additional support for Member States. Two Kunming Biodiversity Fund projects (one in Nepal,and on in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador) were successfully concluded, contributing directly to KMGBF Targets 3 (Ecological Connectivity), 21 (Indigenous and Local Knowledge) and 22 (Community Engagement).

75. Brazil suggested some language adjustments to the decision for this item, which were forwarded to the Secretariat. The main proposed changes consisted of clarification regarding the difference between the HSAP and KMGBF processes, noting that HSAP involves more scientific work while CBD is more political, and that the two should therefore be independent from one another. The language was toned down accordingly. Regarding the integration of biodiversity practices, Brazil inserted references to national circumstances and priorities to enhance flexibility. For the fourth paragraph, Brazil proposed to match the language of the target in the KMGBF.

76. Japan emphasized that the MAB Programme is highly compatible with the KMGBF and reported that it had formulated its own NBSAP based on this alignment. Japan provided an example of the contribution of biosphere reserves to nature-based solutions in Japan.

77. France noted from the document SC-26/CONF.238/5 that the MAB Programme hosted the first meeting of authors of the IPBES 2nd Global Assessment and asked whether the meeting included a presentation on the MAB Programme and the HSAP. France recommended that the Secretariat adopt a strategy to facilitate communication on the HSAP and offered to propose complementary wording to this effect. France also requested information on the Soil Sentinels initiative including on the possible involvement of the WNBR, national committees and scientific partners. France also asked about the content of the Global Biodiversity Governance Brief, noting its utility for Member States. France highlighted the need for research to evaluate the contribution of the WNBR to the KMGBF, the SDGs and the HSAP, and suggested establishing a literature monitoring. France also emphasized the importance of ‘free evolution‘ (a concept close to rewilding), particularly restoration in core areas, as a contribution to the KMGBF.

78. Denmark expressed gratitude to Paraguay for hosting the session and congratulated the new Bureau and President. Denmark thanked the Secretariat for the update on the KMGBF, and noted that the elements presented demonstrate the importance of the MAB Programme. Denmark suggested that it would be useful to have examples of countries referring to biosphere reserves in their NBSAPs and reporting to the KMGBF. Denmark also reported that, in Nordic countries, non-state actors work together to support stronger agency and engagement of local communities based on biosphere reserve experience. Denmark announced that it will be present at COP17 in Armenia and would like to be involved in presenting examples of contributions to the KMGBF from biosphere reserves.

79. The Secretariat stressed the clear alignment between the HSAP and Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), including but not limited to the CBD. The Secretariat noted that MAB is a voluntary programme and that the HSAP does not create additional responsibilities for Member States, but rather brings scientific evidence from Member States to the MEAs. The Secretariat reported that it coordinates UNESCO-level contributions to CBD COPs, including HSAP reporting.. The Secretariat also announced that it is planning a series of webinars on reporting, planning and integrating biosphere reserves into these processes.

80. Finally, Colombia reported on its contributions through the MAB Programme to the KMGBF. Colombia highlighted the importance of paying special attention to certain KMGBF targets and emphasized UNESCO’s unique position to implement efforts to achieve these targets within biosphere reserves, including through GEF projects being

implemented in biosphere reserves, with particular attention to Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant communities and local communities.

DECISION

81. **The MAB Council reaffirmed that biosphere reserves must be increasingly recognized at national level as critical platforms for locally driven conservation and sustainable development, making transformative contributions to the global biodiversity and sustainable development agenda.**

82. **The MAB Council requested the MAB Secretariat to prepare a consolidated set of biosphere reserve contributions to CBD COP17 to inform the first global review of collective progress in implementation of the KMGBF.**

83. **The MAB Council further encouraged Member States, in accordance with national circumstances and priorities, to integrate biosphere reserve practices and data into their updated National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and National Reports, and to reference and promote synergies with priority areas of the Hangzhou SAP in their national KMGBF implementation plans.**

84. **The MAB Council invited Member States eligible to access global environmental financing mechanisms, including the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF), as well as other relevant financing sources, to explore, in collaboration with the MAB Secretariat, and as appropriate, opportunities to mobilize such funds in support of projects implementing the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan, in the country.**

85. **The MAB Council requested the MAB Secretariat, in collaboration with the WNBR, to prepare for validation at the next ICC:**

    - **a communication plan to raise awareness of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan, including at national and local levels, highlighting its contribution to the implementation of existing agreements, notably the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and**
    - **a strategy to draw lessons to inspire post-2030 agreements in the MAB Programme area.**

ITEM 8 – UPDATE ON THE DIGITIZATION OF MAB STATUTORY PROCESSES AND DOCUMENTS AND THE BIOSPHERE RESERVES AND GLOBAL GEOPARKS RESOURCE HUB

86. The Secretariat reported on the significant progress made in the digitalization of MAB's statutory processes and documents, as well as the development of the Biosphere Reserves and Global Geoparks Resource Hub. Following the decisions of the 37th session of the MAB-ICC, the Secretariat finalized the development of the Statutory Submission Platform in early 2026. The operational platform serves as a centralized mechanism for the preparation, submission and review of statutory documents, enhancing efficiency, transparency and coordination among biosphere reserve managers, national authorities and members of the IACBR and the MAB Council.

87. The Secretariat noted that the platform's development included extensive testing with biosphere reserves and national focal points from nine countries (Argentina, Canada, Costa Rica, Denmark, Germany, Japan, Portugal and the Republic of Korea), whose feedback allowed for the resolution of technical and usability issues. The platform was presented at the 38th session of the MAB Council, with user accounts established for

relevant national authorities, including MAB Council members, MAB National Focal Points and UNESCO National Commissions. Participants were invited to familiarize themselves with its functionalities, and national authorities were requested to set up accounts for themselves and their respective biosphere reserves in the weeks following the session. Voluntary use of the platform for statutory submissions will begin in 2026, with mandatory use for all submissions effective from September 2027.

88. The Secretariat also reported on the completion of updates to the former Biodiversity Portal, now renamed the Biosphere Reserve and UNESCO Global Geoparks Resource Hub to better reflect its purpose and added value. The Resource Hub is designed to provide timely access to programme-generated data and documentation, supporting their use in research, funding initiatives and policy-making. It includes improved biosphere reserve profiles, an interactive site map, a document library, a directory of site contacts, and categorized information to enable advanced search and filtering. The integration of biosphere reserves and Global Geoparks within a single platform maximizes efficiency and fosters operational synergies, given their similar governance structures and shared objectives. The Resource Hub was launched at the 38th session of the MAB Council, with initial access limited to members of the network prior to broader public release.

89. The Secretariat further outlined efforts to enhance biosphere reserve profiles within the Resource Hub by extracting relevant information from existing statutory documents through an AI-supported workflow. National authorities and biosphere reserve managers were invited to review and supplement this information, with updates carried out through the Statutory Submission Platform. The Resource Hub will remain password-protected and unindexed by search engines until August 2026, allowing time for national authorities to review and update their information. Once the platform begins receiving submissions, it will transmit data directly to the Resource Hub, ensuring that the most up-to-date information is displayed.

90. The Secretariat reported that training materials on the use of the Statutory Submission Platform have been developed, covering account creation, navigation and the submission of statutory forms. Information sessions were proposed for the end of June, with additional sessions planned for July and September. Digital versions of the materials presented during the 38th session will be made available afterwards.

91. The Secretariat also provided an update on the GIS-based alert system, initially presented at the 37th session, which has been updated to include biosphere reserves and Global Geoparks. Alerts are generated by superimposing near-real-time satellite imagery of natural events, such as fires and other hazards, with site spatial data. Currently, the Secretariat receives and forwards these alerts to relevant parties when threats are deemed significant. However, the system does not yet support automatic transmission of alerts directly to sites or Member States due to resource constraints.

92. Finally, the Secretariat highlighted the development of an ‘ICC Decision Tracker‘, a database to track MAB Council decisions concerning the status of biosphere reserve nominations and periodic reviews. The tracker has proven instrumental in identifying inconsistencies in site statuses, harmonizing deadlines for transboundary biosphere reserves and projecting trends in submissions. The Secretariat also noted requests from organizations such as IPBES, IUCN and the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) to access MAB Programme data for analysis and reporting, and sought the Council’s guidance on sharing spatial data with external organizations under specific conditions to safeguard the interests of individual sites and Member States.

93. The Republic of Korea welcomed the establishment of the resource hub and expressed support for the recommendations presented. It sought clarification regarding the

relationship between the resource hub and the UNESCO Site Navigator and proposed the development of guidance within the Technical Guidelines for Biosphere Reserves to support the long-term governance and management of the platform.

94. Japan welcomed the simplification and efficiency gains offered by the platform and raised questions regarding the definition of reference data, the recording of zonation changes and the protection of uploaded information from unauthorized third-party use.

95. Lithuania welcomed the launch of the platform and its contribution to transparency, efficiency and evidence-based decision-making. It encouraged continued capacity-building and training activities, and emphasized the importance of ensuring sufficient time for Member States to respond and robust safeguards for data security.

96. France supported the revision and simplification of reporting processes but stressed that such efforts should not compromise the quality of biosphere reserves or the requirements of the Statutory Framework. It considered the proposed implementation timeline unrealistic, particularly in view of summer holidays and ongoing reporting obligations, and called for a more inclusive consultation process, greater flexibility around data entry and further development of the alert system.

97. Canada welcomed the progress in digitalization and highlighted its participation in testing the platform. While supporting modernization of the reporting system, it expressed concern regarding the proposed deadlines and called for additional time to facilitate adaptation by biosphere reserve managers and Member States.

98. Guinea commended the Secretariat on the progress achieved and emphasized the need for flexibility and capacity-building support, particularly for countries facing administrative and institutional challenges.

99. Austria supported the digitalization process and sought clarification regarding the consistency of the proposed data-sharing arrangements with previous decisions of the Council concerning open-access policies.

100. Honduras thanked the host for organizing this meeting and welcomed the development of the platform, raising questions regarding interoperability with national systems, management of user access and the operation of the alert system. It noted that alert mechanisms would need to be implemented carefully, given their potential political and local sensitivities.

101. Italy congratulated the Secretariat on the initiative and supported its overall direction. It nevertheless considered the proposed timetable too ambitious and advocated for a longer transition period, stronger involvement of biosphere reserve managers and national structures, and broader use of the platform across UNESCO-designated sites.

102. The United Republic of Tanzania welcomed both the platform and the resource hub, and encouraged the Secretariat to continue capacity-building efforts, including support for coastal and marine biosphere reserves.

103. Colombia welcomed the digitalization process and requested clarification regarding user roles, permissions and procedures for appointing authorized users at the biosphere and national levels.

104. Spain expressed strong support for the initiative and the simplification of reporting processes but considered the proposed deadlines unrealistic. It suggested extending the timeline for site profile validation and mandatory implementation.

105. Portugal welcomed the initiative and acknowledged the complexity of harmonizing information across the Programme. It stressed the importance of maintaining an open, transparent and inclusive process, with continued engagement of Member States throughout implementation. Portugal also highlighted the need for training and capacity-building measures to support effective use of the platform.

106. In response, the Secretariat welcomed the comments received and indicated that the implementation timetable would be reviewed. It clarified the distinction between the resource hub, a database for statutory data and the UNESCO Site Navigator, which is a GIS platform. It explained the proposed user access structure, which permits different roles for different users, and reiterated its commitment to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the platform. The Secretariat also informed the delegations that consultations regarding data governance, reporting simplification and alert-system criteria would continue.

107. France sought clarification regarding the financial sustainability of the new platform, including the costs associated with ensuring its security and long-term maintenance, and suggested that such costs should be reflected transparently in the programme budget. France also recalled that the ICC had previously endorsed the development of an alert system and emphasized the importance of its implementation and communication to biosphere reserves.

108. Canada noted that greater clarity regarding the procedures used by the IACBR in reviewing periodic review files could help reduce uncertainty among biosphere reserve managers and facilitate preparation of submissions.

109. Austria sought clarification regarding the treatment of proposed amendments during the drafting process including whether amendments submitted by delegations would be reflected accurately in the meeting report.

110. In response, the Secretariat indicated that proposed amendments would be discussed bilaterally with the delegations concerned and reflected appropriately in the draft report. Regarding the sustainability of the platform, the Secretariat explained that lessons had been learned from previous digital initiatives and that the new system had been designed with higher initial investment costs in order to ensure long-term operation through the regular programme budget, while future upgrades would require additional resources.

111. With regard to the alert system, the Secretariat noted that further work was required to define the criteria and procedures governing its operation. It highlighted the challenges associated with determining the types of events or activities that would trigger alerts and emphasized the need to take into account differing national legal contexts and circumstances. The Secretariat informed the delegations that consultations were ongoing with National Commissions, MAB focal points and biosphere reserve managers to clarify the role of the Secretariat and establish appropriate criteria for the system. The Secretariat further emphasized that improved digital tools should contribute to greater transparency and support the effective implementation of periodic review processes.

DECISION:

112. **The MAB Council took note of the launch of the Statutory Submission Platform and, recognizing the importance of timely onboarding, encouraged Member States to ensure that relevant national authorities create user accounts, familiarize themselves with the platform and grant access to biosphere reserve managers and stakeholders by 30 September 2026. The MAB Council further encouraged Member States to prioritize access for biosphere reserves preparing submissions for September 2027, in view of the transition to mandatory online submissions.**

113. **The MAB Council decided that the submission platform will become mandatory starting in 2028. Countries are encouraged to use the platform starting in 2027; however, they may continue submit new nomination dossiers and periodic review reports in PDF format until 30 September 2027. Biosphere reserves currently engaged in the Process of Excellence may also finalize their reports using the current format.**

114. **The MAB Council took note of the planned training activities and encouraged Member States to support the dissemination of training information and promote participation among biosphere reserve managers and relevant stakeholders.**

115. **The MAB Council took note of the launch of the Biosphere Reserve and Global Geoparks Resource Hub and, recognizing the importance of complete and accurate information, encouraged Member States and biosphere reserves to review and validate the information contained in biosphere reserve profiles by 31 December 2026. The MAB Council further encouraged Member States to submit any updates through the Statutory Submission Platform, noting that such updates will contribute to forthcoming periodic review submissions.**

116. **Re-affirming the Council decision to allow open access to data submitted by Member States in statutory documents and in line with the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science, the MAB Council recognized the value of the Programme's expanding data resources. The Council expressed support for the sharing of consolidated Programme data, where such sharing advances the objectives of the Programme and the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan and is subject to conditions that safeguard the data of individual sites and Member States.**

ITEM 9 – UPDATE ON THE PREPARATION OF A MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR THE MAB HANGZHOU STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN (2026-2035)

117. The Secretariat reported on the preparation of a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (HSAP, 2026–2035), as mandated by the MAB-ICC at its 37th session. The draft M&E system, based on results-based management principles, is designed to track implementation, results and compliance with the HSAP's 34 action targets and 78 sub-targets, guided by the principles of participation, learning, usefulness, transparency and integration of lessons learned.

118. The Secretariat explained that the M&E system is built around two complementary processes: monitoring (continuous tracking of progress toward HSAP goals using performance indicators) and evaluation (periodic assessment of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability). Together, these processes support results-based management, aligning planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation around clearly defined results – outputs, outcomes and impacts – to inform decision-making and learning.

119. The Secretariat emphasized that the M&E system is designed to generate strategic information while minimizing reporting burdens. It leverages existing statutory processes and data, prioritizes a limited set of core indicators applicable across diverse biosphere reserves, and aligns with global frameworks and standards, such as the KMGBF. The system also assesses how biosphere reserves contribute to local and national policy and planning.

120. To operationalize the HSAP, the M&E framework translates its targets into a results framework by:

- clarifying roles and responsibilities for data collection, reporting and use of findings across the Secretariat, national authorities and biosphere reserves;
- reframing HSAP targets through a results-based management lens, with clearly defined intermediate results and actions to track progress;
- designing data collection approaches to establish baselines and capture results within and beyond biosphere reserves; and
- determining methods for sharing findings for learning, decision-making and reporting.

121. The Secretariat proposed a monitoring approach that relies on voluntary annual progress reports submitted by biosphere reserves and national authorities, using 20 standardized core indicators (10 at output level and 10 at outcome level). These indicators, strengthened by disaggregation categories and narrative information, enable tracking of 60 out of 78 HSAP sub-targets, including all targets assigned to biosphere reserves and the majority assigned to national authorities. The remaining 18 sub-targets, classified as input or impact indicators, will be addressed through alternative reporting processes.

122. The proposed monitoring process will be implemented through:

- online surveys for biosphere reserves (15–20 questions) and national authorities (4 indicators), aligned with the Statutory Submission Platform;
- voluntary reporting with data submitted following national authority approval but without review by the IACBR or ICC (the Secretariat will compile, analyse and aggregate the data, presenting consolidated findings to governing bodies and the network every one to two years); and
- Periodic Reviews providing additional qualitative data to support evaluation.

123. The Secretariat also proposed information products to be developed from M&E data, including:

- monitoring summary reports (annual or biennial) presenting achievements, challenges and progress toward HSAP targets;
- online updates for biosphere reserve profiles on the Biosphere Reserves and UNESCO Global Geoparks Resource Hub;
- project pipeline overviews to support resource mobilization and partnership development; and
- needs and gap analyses to identify priority areas and opportunities for targeted assistance.

124. For evaluation, the Secretariat proposed a baseline assessment survey at the launch of the M&E system, followed by three evaluations:

- an early-stage review (two to three years after implementation) to assess the functionality of the M&E framework and processes;

- a mid-term evaluation (five to six years into the Strategy period) to assess progress toward expected results, identify strengths and weaknesses, and support adaptive management; and

- a final evaluation (at the end of the Strategy period) to assess overall performance, sustainability of results and lessons for future strategies.

125. The implementation timetable aligns with key HSAP milestones, with the M&E system expected to be adopted in 2027, followed by the launch of voluntary reporting in 2028 and the first monitoring summary report in 2029.

126. Delegations generally welcomed the Secretariat's initiative and recognized the importance of monitoring progress towards implementation of the HSAP. At the same time, many delegations stressed the need to ensure that the framework remains practical, flexible and proportionate to available capacities.

127. Brazil emphasized the need for a clearer and more structured consultation process, including opportunities for Member States to review and comment on the draft framework before finalization. It proposed revisions to the draft recommendations and requested clarification regarding the envisaged process leading to consideration of the framework in 2027.

128. France supported the principle of a limited set of core indicators but questioned the relevance and feasibility of several proposed indicators. It called for clearer methodologies and protocols, a testing phase prior to implementation and a reduction in reporting burdens. France further cautioned against creating a monitoring system that could become an objective in itself rather than a tool to support implementation of the HSAP. During the subsequent discussion, France recalled experiences from the development of monitoring systems under other global frameworks and stressed the importance of maintaining a light and cost-effective approach focused primarily on implementation rather than reporting.

129. The Republic of Korea welcomed the draft framework and underscored the importance of monitoring implementation of the HSAP. It expressed concern that a voluntary reporting system could result in data gaps and bias, particularly where biosphere reserves face operational challenges. The Republic of Korea also suggested the development of guidance materials and the consideration of indicators related to broader global biodiversity and climate commitments. In the discussion on a possible working group, it cautioned that such mechanisms require sustained support and resources and suggested that the Secretariat provide additional documentation before a decision is taken.

130. Lithuania emphasized that the framework should provide clear added value to Member States and highlighted the importance of demonstrating how biosphere reserves contribute to national policy objectives.

131. Canada welcomed the draft framework and supported concerns raised regarding the feasibility of certain indicators. It noted that a voluntary approach could disproportionately reflect the experiences of sites with greater resources and capacities. Canada also highlighted the challenges that some biosphere reserves, including those managed by Indigenous Peoples, may face in contributing to reporting requirements.

132. Japan stressed that the framework should remain flexible and feasible and should not create additional administrative burdens for Member States. It expressed support for the concerns raised by France and Canada regarding reporting requirements and indicator feasibility.

133. The United Republic of Tanzania welcomed the initiative as an important accountability mechanism and proposed the inclusion of indicators relating to community livelihoods, Indigenous knowledge, ecosystem services, climate change, sustainable resource use and economic benefits. The United Republic of Tanzania also emphasized the importance of practical guidance, simple reporting tools and capacity-building support.

134. China suggested drawing upon the expertise of those involved in drafting the HSAP by establishing a consultative group to support further development of the M&E framework.

135. Costa Rica encouraged closer integration between the proposed monitoring framework and the periodic review process in order to reduce duplication and reporting burdens and improve efficiency.

136. Colombia emphasized the importance of assessing both the feasibility of indicators and the degree of progress achieved under the HSAP. It advocated a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches and stressed that biosphere reserves advance at different rates. During the subsequent discussion, Colombia shared the experience of IberoMAB, which established a regional working group to review implementation of the HSAP and identify achievable targets and timelines, thereby strengthening regional cooperation and governance.

137. The Cook Islands supported concerns regarding the capacity constraints faced by Indigenous Peoples and local communities and by Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in meeting additional reporting requirements.

138. Honduras proposed a phased and gradual approach to the adoption of indicators, allowing time for adaptation while ensuring that no biosphere reserves are left behind. It also raised the possibility of establishing a working group to review indicators and support further development of the framework.

139. In response, the Secretariat welcomed the comments received and indicated that the draft recommendations would be revised to reflect Member States' suggestions. It noted that the framework was intended to adopt an incremental results-based approach and emphasized efforts to align reporting requirements with existing periodic review processes and national reporting systems, in order to minimize duplication. The Secretariat further stated that the establishment of a working group would be possible should the Council so decide, provided that clear terms of reference are agreed.

140. The Chair, noting the range of views expressed, concluded that additional time would be required for discussion of the proposed framework.

DECISION:

141. **The MAB Council invited Member States to provide comments and suggestions on the draft framework by 31 December 2026, in order for the Secretariat to present an updated HSAP M&E system for evaluation at the 39th session of the MAB Council in 2027.**

142. **Based on the comments received by the Members, the MAB Council requested that the Secretariat further elaborate the draft M&E system presented in document SC-26/CONF.238/7, and to follow the opinions, advice and proposals submitted by Member States during the present ICC meeting to establish a working framework to be further refined over the coming year.**

ITEM 10 – THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN THE MAB PROGRAMME, INCLUDING THE 3RD GLOBAL YOUTH FORUM

143. The Secretariat reported on progress achieved in strengthening youth engagement in the MAB Programme, in line with the recommendations of the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on Youth Engagement and the decisions of the 37th session of the MAB-ICC, through a video message. Following the Council's call to nominate National MAB Youth Focal Points, the Secretariat continued to invite Member States to designate and confirm their focal points. As of April 2026, 60.1 per cent of Member States had nominated National MAB Youth Focal Points, reflecting substantive progress towards enhancing youth participation in decision-making and programme implementation at all levels.

144. The Secretariat outlined efforts to support newly designated National MAB Youth Focal Points, including a series of five training webinars held in December 2025 across UNESCO's five regions. These sessions provided a platform to discuss roles, responsibilities and opportunities to advance youth engagement. Additionally, the Secretariat conducted a global MAB Youth Mapping Survey (November–December 2025), with support from the Government of Quebec, to assess youth-led activities across the WNBR, identify challenges and pinpoint priority areas for strengthening engagement. The survey results, published in January 2026 in English, French and Spanish, revealed strong youth engagement across the network and a willingness to deepen involvement, presenting opportunities to strengthen communication, coordination and mobilization in support of youth-led action. The findings informed the development of the 3rd Global MAB Youth Forum and the formulation of the MAB Youth Roadmap, which will guide youth priorities and actions over the next decade.

145. The Secretariat further reported on a new partnership with Vivo through the 'Capture the Future: Global Youth Storytelling Initiative for People and Nature', which empowers MAB Youth to document and share local experiences from biosphere reserves through digital storytelling, while building capacities in communication, advocacy and environmental leadership. As part of this initiative, training programmes were conducted at three universities in Egypt, Italy and Malaysia in April 2026, complemented by an immersive training camp with contest winners in June 2026 in Italy.

146. The 3rd Global MAB Youth Forum was held in the Po Delta Biosphere Reserve, Italy (18–22 May 2026), bringing together over 150 young participants (ages 18–35) from across the WNBR. Under the theme 'Committed to the Future We Want' and fully aligned with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (2026–2035), the Forum marked the first global gathering of newly designated National MAB Youth Focal Points. Key outcomes included the development of a MAB Youth Declaration and a MAB Youth Roadmap, as well as strategies to strengthen the integration of youth within MAB governance structures and decision-making processes.

147. The Secretariat also highlighted regional and local youth initiatives, including a MAB Youth Communication Toolkit training, held in Monze, Zambia (November 2025), which brought together National MAB Youth Focal Points from Southern Africa with support from the German and Zambian National Commissions for UNESCO and the UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa. Further regional forums are planned, including a EuroMAB Youth meeting in September 2026 and the IberoMAB Youth Forum at the end of 2026.

148. Following the outcomes of the 3rd Global MAB Youth Forum and the recommendations of the 37th MAB-ICC session, the Secretariat noted that the OEWG's Recommendations on Youth Engagement will be reviewed and updated to ensure alignment with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan prior to their integration into the Technical Guidelines for Biosphere Reserves.

149. Mr Walter Groehn, youth delegate from Paraguay, subsequently took the floor to share his experience at the Forum.

150. Italy welcomed the presentation, commended the youth delegate's address for conveying the legacy and impact of the Forum, and requested that the in-kind contribution from Italy for this Forum and its outcomes be incorporated into the relevant meeting documents for the next ICC. Italy stressed that the inclusion of young people in biosphere reserve management and governance structures should be treated as a priority, drawing on their capacities in communication and various fields, and shared concrete country experiences.

151. China thanked the Secretariat for organizing the 3rd Global MAB Youth Forum in Italy and extended its appreciation to Italy for hosting the event, noted that the Chinese participants would present the outcomes of their experience at the upcoming China Biosphere Reserve Network Annual Meeting. China also conveyed a recommendation of the Chinese National MAB Youth Focal Point, proposing that one or two Chinese biosphere reserves with strong interest in international cooperation be paired with counterpart reserves in Italy, Uzbekistan or African countries to jointly design a one-to-two-year youth practice exchange programme, encompassing online seminars, exchange of case-study videos on conservation and short-term mutual visits for young professionals.

152. Lithuania underlined the responsibility of Member States in enabling the next generation to play a meaningful role in biosphere reserve governance and decision-making processes, and noted that Lithuania's National MAB Youth Focal Point is employed full-time within the biosphere reserve structure, ensuring long-term and substantive engagement rather than symbolic participation. Lithuania stressed that youth engagement should extend beyond events to focus on concrete contributions on the ground.

153. The Republic of Korea invited its National MAB Youth Focal Point, who had attended the 3rd Global MAB Youth Forum in Italy, to address the Council directly. The delegate shared that the Forum had offered a meaningful opportunity for youth participants to shape the Forum's declaration themselves, and that the experience had deepened her understanding of the diversity of situations faced by young people across countries, including differences in educational and financial circumstances. She noted that these insights would be applied to her work at the national level and incorporated into the roadmap being prepared for youth engagement within the MAB Programme.

154. Mali highlighted the important role that youth play in the country, noting that the national authority organized a conference for youth in 2024 with the aim of generating solutions that take into account the perspectives of young people. The delegation underlined the importance of active youth participation in the protection of ecosystems, forests and other natural resources, and welcomed the cooperation initiatives advanced by the Secretariat in this regard. Mali noted that its National MAB Youth Focal Point chairs an association active in conservation work and expressed its readiness to share good practices with all parties.

155. France thanked the Secretariat and its partners for facilitating youth engagement across a range of activities, including through the mechanism of National MAB Youth Focal Points, the organization of the Forum and associated webinars. France proposed a minor amendment to the draft decision.

156. Canada applauded the Secretariat for the National MAB Youth Focal Point initiative and encouraged the Secretariat to develop global guidelines clarifying the roles and responsibilities of youth focal points. Canada thanked Italy for hosting the 3rd Global MAB Youth Forum, raising nonetheless concern that some youth participants at the

Forum had not received endorsement from their national authorities, and asked the Secretariat to exercise due caution in examining nominations for future forums to ensure that participants carry the appropriate backing.

157. Austria reaffirmed that youth integration is a core element of its national MAB activities, and shared its experience of appointing the same individual as youth focal point across multiple UNESCO designation programmes and activities, thereby generating synergies, effectiveness and avoiding duplication.

158. Japan commended the progress made on youth engagement and reaffirmed that promoting youth participation is vital to the long-term development of the MAB Programme. The delegation reported that the MAB Youth Network in Japan is showing steady growth, with a National Youth Focal Point now appointed and the Japan MAB Youth Programme formally established in 2026. Three Japanese youth representatives participated in the 3rd Global MAB Youth Forum in Italy, where they played active roles in the drafting of the Forum's declaration. Japan further noted that its National Committee has provided financial support and dispatched youth delegates to MAB regional and thematic network meetings, including the Southeast Asian Biosphere Reserve Network (SEABRNet), where they have participated actively in the sessions.

159. The Cook Islands affirmed that youth engagement is critical to the future of both the environment and sustainable development in small island contexts. The delegation highlighted the national experience of engaging youth in restoration, monitoring and community stewardship programmes, through which young people contribute to scientific knowledge and develop as environmental leaders. The Cook Islands encouraged continued efforts to support youth from SIDS within international mechanisms.

160. Colombia congratulated the Secretariat for promoting the nomination of National MAB Youth Focal Points. The delegation highlighted the close linkage between youth engagement and the work of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including Afro-descendant communities, within its biosphere reserves. Given the rich cultural diversity present in Colombian biosphere reserves, permanent working mechanisms have been established to enable youth to exchange knowledge and experiences.

161. Brazil affirmed that meaningful youth participation is essential to the long-term success of the MAB Programme, and expressed pride in having brought the coordinator of the Brazilian Youth Network for Biosphere Reserves to the Council as part of its official delegation, in recognition of the value Brazil places on youth contributions to substantive discussions. Brazil noted that young people are actively involved in policy-making discussions on biosphere reserves and underlined the broader role of youth in bringing innovation and sustaining community participation. The delegation also highlighted the role of the IberoMAB network in facilitating the participation of youth delegates alongside national delegations.

162. Guinea emphasized that youth participation is a cornerstone of its national activities, but noted that an individual had been proposed for the role of National MAB Youth Focal Point by a non-governmental organization (NGO) without the knowledge of the Guinean Ministry. Guinea underlined the importance of ensuring that the nomination process for youth focal points is conducted with the full awareness and endorsement of the relevant national authorities.

163. In response, the Secretariat thanked all Member States that have already designated a National MAB Youth Focal Point. Regarding the concerns raised by Canada and Guinea, it noted that situations of this kind are precisely the reason the Secretariat requires nominations to be submitted through official national channels, in keeping with the

intergovernmental nature of the Programme. The Secretariat further clarified that countries may designate more than one youth focal point should they wish to do so.

DECISION:

164. **The MAB Council took note of the progress made by the Secretariat in advancing youth engagement across the MAB Programme, including the designation of National MAB Youth Focal Points, the implementation of the MAB Youth Mapping Survey, the development of strategic partnerships and the organization of the 3rd Global MAB Youth Forum.**

165. **The MAB Council encouraged the review of the OEWG's Recommendations on Youth Engagement in the MAB Programme, informed by the outcomes of the 3rd Global MAB Youth Forum, which are expected to include the MAB Youth Declaration and Roadmap, to ensure alignment with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan prior to their integration into the Technical Guidelines for Biosphere Reserves. The review of these recommendations must be carried out in collaboration with MAB youth and promote intergenerational exchanges.**

166. **The MAB Council encourages Member States that have not yet done so to nominate a National MAB Youth Focal Point and invited those that have already done so to further support their active engagement, including through meaningful participation in decision-making processes and programme implementation at all levels.**

167. **The MAB Council encouraged Member States, biosphere reserve managers and partners to support the implementation of the anticipated MAB Youth Roadmap and to strengthen youth engagement through capacity-building, resource mobilization and strategic partnerships, in line with the priorities of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan.**

ITEM 11 – MAB YOUNG SCIENTISTS AWARD (YSA) AND MAB YSA PRINCE ALBERT I OF MONACO AWARDS

168. The MAB Secretariat introduced document SC-26/CONF.238/9 and presented the proposed winners of the MAB Young Scientists Awards (MAB YSA) 2026, as well as the MAB YSA Prince Albert I of Monaco 2026. The MAB Council was invited to consider and endorse the proposed winners as selected by the Bureau.

169. The Secretariat explained that 73 eligible applications from 47 countries had been received for the MAB YSA 2026 (46) and the MAB YSA Prince Albert I of Monaco 2026 (27), including from 29 female applicants.

170. Taking into consideration only the MAB YSA 2025, 46 eligible applications from 35 countries were received. Of these, 22 applications came from Africa (AFR), 7 from Asia and the Pacific (APA), 7 from the Arab States (ARB), 2 from Europe and North America (ENA), and 8 from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The applications were submitted by 19 female and 27 male applicants. The Bureau reviewed these submissions and, in accordance with the established criteria, selected six winners of the MAB YSA to receive a total allocation of up to US$30,000.

171. The six winners endorsed under the general criteria represented six different countries, with a gender distribution of 17 per cent female and 83 per cent male, and with a regional representation as follows: LAC (1), AFR (3), ARB (1) and APA (1). The Secretariat confirmed that the awards are set at a maximum of US$5,000 each.

172. The winners were: Marc Koutchoro Agbatan (Benin), Mohamad Syahrul Nizam bin Ibrahim (Malaysia), Debeli Chala Biyena (Ethiopia), Elizabeth Munjosi (Kenya), Mahmoud Kamal Hamdoun Marwan (Egypt) and David Leonidas Grefa Yumbo (Ecuador). Their research topics covered the following themes: community and Indigenous involvement, climate change adaptation, sustainable management and ecosystem services including pollination, ecological indicators, ecosystem-based mitigation of disasters and local ecological knowledge assessment.

173. The Secretariat further informed the Council that 27 eligible applications from 21 countries had been received for the MAB YSA Prince Albert I of Monaco. These included applications from 10 female and 17 male applicants. Regionally, applications were distributed as follows: AFR (7), APA (8), ARB (3), ENA (3) and LAC (6). In line with the decisions of the 34th and 36th MAB-ICC sessions, Monaco provided five additional awards, specifically to highlight coastal and island biosphere reserves and to support the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

174. Based on the Bureau's review, five winners were proposed for endorsement, representing five different countries. The gender distribution was 60 per cent female and 40 per cent male, with regional representation as follows: AFR (2), ENA (1) and LAC (2).

175. The selected awardees were: Uriel Faïzoun (Benin), Awa Toure (Senegal), Laura Lupeikaitė-Kuncienė (Lithuania), Leslie Jazmín Novoa Mansilla (Chile) and Jose Luis Cortez Flores (Peru) (see Table 2). Their studies focused on mangrove conservation and restoration, climate change adaptation and education, the role of biosphere reserves in supporting wildlife rehabilitation, benthic assemblages and spatial planning.

176. Monaco noted the excellent and well-balanced representation among the award recipients, including a strong gender diversity component. The MAB Young Scientist – Prince Albert I Award was highlighted as a key initiative reflecting Monaco's commitment, with plans to establish a network of past award recipients. Monaco also reaffirmed its support to UNESCO, particularly in the designation of new biosphere reserves, with a special focus on coastal and marine areas, as well as SIDS.

DECISION:

177. **The MAB Council endorsed the eleven (11) winners of the 2026 MAB Young Scientists Award comprising six (6) awardees under the general criteria and conditions, and five (5) awardees whose studies focus on marine, island and coastal issues.**

178. **The winners who received regular support from UNESCO and the titles of their research studies are presented in Table 1. The winners who received support from the Principality of Monaco and the titles of their research studies are given in Table 2.**

Table 1. Winners of the MAB YSA 2026

	Winner	Gender	Country	Region	Title of study
1	Marc Koutchoro Agbatan	M	Benin	AFR	Analysis of the role of local communities in nature-based strategies for climate change adaptation in the Mono Transboundary Biosphere Reserve
2	Mohamad Syahrul Nizam bin Ibrahim	M	Malaysia	APA	Integrating Indigenous custodianship and sustainable ecotourism: Advancing the SDGs and community

					well-being of the Orang Sungei in the Kinabatangan Biosphere Reserve
3	Debeli Chala Biyena	M	Ethiopia	AFR	Linking ecosystem services and livelihood resilience for sustainable biosphere reserve management: Evidence from the Anywaa Biosphere Reserve, Ethiopia
4	Elizabeth Munjosi	F	Kenya	AFR	Altitude specific landslide susceptibility and vegetation-based mitigation in the Mt Elgon Biosphere Reserve, Kenya: Assessment of intensity, cover threshold and ecosystem benefits
5	Mahmoud Kamal Hamdoun Marwan	M	Egypt	ARB	Rapid interpretation-based assessment of local ecological knowledge and natural resource use in Wadi Allaqi Biosphere Reserve, Egypt
6	David Leonidas Grefa Yumbo	M	Ecuador	LAC	Orchid bees (*Euglossini*) as ecological bioindicators: A comparison between conserved and disturbed forests in the Sumaco Biosphere Reserve, Ecuador

Table 2. Winners of the MAB YSA Prince Albert I of Monaco 2026

	Winner	Gender	Country	Region	Title of study
1	Uriel Faïzoun	M	Benin	AFR	Assessment of mangrove degradation and participatory restoration in the Mono Biosphere Reserve (Benin)
2	Awa Toure	F	Senegal	AFR	Climate Education in Schools and Local Initiatives for Adaptation and Conservation of Mangroves in the Sine-Saloum Region (Senegal): Analysing Connections, Levers and Obstacles
3	Laura Lupeikaitė-Kuncienė	F	Lithuania	ENA	Evaluating the role of biosphere reserves in the post-release adaptation of rehabilitated grey seals in the Baltic Sea
4	Leslie Jazmín Novoa Mansilla	F	Chile	LAC	Unravelling the Influence of Proglacial Environments on Benthic Assemblages: Cloué Ice Field, Cape Horn Biosphere Reserve
5	Jose Luis Cortez Flores	M	Peru	LAC	Targeting mangrove-based adaptation: A spatial decision-support model for climate resilience in the Noroeste Amotapes-Manglares Biosphere Reserve, Peru

ITEM 12 – REPORTS ON ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN BY MEMBER STATES/REGIONAL AND THEMATIC MAB NETWORKS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MAB PROGRAMME

179. China reported on its active implementation of the MAB Programme at both national and international levels over the past two years. Nationally, the China National Committee

for MAB (MAB China), chaired by the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), coordinated extensive activities, including the launch of the third and fourth rounds of the Young Researcher Supporting Project, funding 42 research projects focused on biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services, community relations and Indigenous knowledge. MAB China also established the 'Young Scientist Award' and the 'Green Guard Award', recognizing 10 young researchers and 12 rangers for their contributions. The committee published 12 issues of the *Man and the Biosphere* magazine, highlighting key biosphere reserves, and organized the 25th and 26th Annual Conferences of the China Biosphere Reserve Network (CBRN) under the themes of implementing MAB principles and exploring sustainable development pathways. In 2024, 14 new protected areas joined the CBRN, expanding its membership to 214. MAB China also conducted field surveys, including at the Huize Black-necked Crane Nature Reserve, to support national nature reserve regulations, and launched initiatives like the Youth Climate Action and Disaster Risk Reduction Maker Initiative and the 'Listen to the Biosphere' campaign to engage the public in biodiversity documentation.

180. At the international level, China successfully hosted the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves in September 2025, welcoming over 4,000 delegates from nearly 150 countries, who adopted the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan and the Hangzhou Declaration. China's biosphere reserves received global recognition at the Congress with the presentation of the Michel Batisse Award to Mr Shu Zufei for his innovative work in biodiversity monitoring (Chebaling Biosphere Reserve), and the MAB Young Scientists Awards (including the Prince Albert I of Monaco Award) to Ms Cao Jiasuo and Mr Zhuang Hongfei. China also expanded its network of biosphere reserves with the designation of the Zhouzhi and Daqingshan in 2025, bringing the total number of biosphere reserves in China to 36. An application has also been submitted for the expansion of the Hanma Biosphere Reserve. China also launched the International Initiative on Nature Education Cooperation with Alliance of International Science Organizations (ANSO) and the International Society of Zoological Science (ISZS), gaining support from over 150 representatives from 20 countries. Lastly, China premiered the documentary *Diary of Biosphere*, which won Gold and Silver Awards at the 47th Telly Awards in 2026.

181. France reported that in 2025–2026, the MAB France network implemented three major activities. The first of these was the official launch of the Biospher'Adapt project, winner of the EU LIFE programme since 2024, which aims to develop climate change adaptation strategies in seven partner biosphere reserves while fostering territorial dynamics with local stakeholders, including through collaboration with the Mediterranean Biosphere Reserve Network (MedMAB) and its RES-MAB project. France also noted its participation as one of eight partners in the Biodiversa+ BECOME project, which uses UNESCO biosphere reserves as model tools to analyse synergies between conservation and human development, publishing a report on contributions to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework in the third quarter of 2025.

182. The third activity reported on by France was a two-year cooperation programme between the MAB Master's programme at the University of Toulouse and Kanazawa University (Japan), which facilitates student exchanges and internships. France drew attention to an action study on 'free evolution' (spaces where natural ecological processes occur without human intervention), led by the French National Commission for UNESCO since 2023, that has enabled the organization of the 'Free Evolution Days at UNESCO headquarters for the last three years with the cooperation of international partners from Belgium, Germany, Switzerland and other countries.

183. Canada affirmed that its re-election to the MAB-ICC in November 2025, after a 27-year absence, symbolizes a revitalized commitment to the Programme, supported by a reconstituted Canadian MAB Committee and a strengthened governance framework. The country's 19 biosphere reserves – covering 22.3 million hectares (ha) across 277

municipalities and 45 Indigenous communities – have delivered tangible results, including the recognition of 8,400 ha of Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) and the identification of 734,000 additional hectares, directly supporting the 30x30 target of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Federal investments of CA$23 million (2022–2026) have catalysed CA$57.5 million in total community co-investment, demonstrating a 2.5:1 return and funding initiatives from Indigenous-led conservation to urban sustainability, while embedding reconciliation, youth leadership and ecosystem-based adaptation as core principles.

184. Internationally, Canada is advancing collaborative efforts, hosting the 2026 EuroMAB Conference at Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region under the theme 'Interwoven Futures', which prioritizes Indigenous knowledge systems, intergenerational dialogue and integrated sustainability approaches. The network has also contributed to global discussions by sharing innovative OECM strategies and Indigenous inclusion models at the 37th MAB-ICC session, while piloting UNESCO's new digital platform for periodic reviews. With a new nomination (Québec City) underway and strengthened periodic review processes – such as adapted evaluation for Tsá Tué, the world's first Indigenous-led biosphere reserve – Canada is poised to share its community-driven, reconciliation-centred approach, and draw on the experience of international peers for effective implementation of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan.

185. Japan's report highlighted its active governance and collaborative approach to the MAB Programme, with the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO (JNCU) leading the MAB National Committee in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and other stakeholders. Local governments, organized through the autonomous Japanese Biosphere Reserves Network (JBRN), play a central role in implementing bottom-up initiatives, supported academically by the Japanese Coordinating Committee for MAB and Japan MAB Youth. At the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves and the 37th MAB-ICC in Hangzhou, Japan co-organized a side event on mainstreaming the MAB Programme in climate action and nature-positive initiatives, while also supporting regional capacity-building through the SeaBRnet and Asia-Pacific Biosphere Reserves Network meetings via Japanese Funds-in-Trust (JFIT).

186. At the national level, Japan celebrated the approval of periodic reviews for the Tadami and Minami-Alps Biosphere Reserves and the expansion of the Shiga Highlands site. Three other reserves are preparing periodic reviews for 2027: Hakusan, Yakushima and Kuchinoerabujima, and Odaigahara, Omine and Osugidani. The JBRN held its general assembly as well as on-site working meetings to share best practices, including partnerships with private sector actors like AEON Ltd., advanced youth engagement through programmes such as the Mount Hakusan Biosphere Reserve Youth Network, and international exchanges via the Japan Inter-University Network for MAB (JU-MAB). Japanese universities, including Kanazawa and Yokohama National University, hosted UNESCO Chairs focused on education for sustainable development (ESD) and intergenerational learning, organizing workshops, field-based learning and international seminars to deepen collaboration and knowledge sharing across biosphere reserves.

187. The Republic of Korea reported on its efforts to strengthen national monitoring, assessment and capacity-building for biosphere reserves, including five-year check-ups for four reserves and the preparation of a new national strategy aligned with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan. The MAB National Committee provided financial support for diverse projects in biodiversity conservation, community education and ecotourism, while advancing youth engagement through the Youth Leaders Programme, online webinars and the 5th Youth Forum for Biosphere Reserves, which contributed to management planning in Changnyeong Biosphere Reserve.

188. At the international level, the Republic of Korea actively participated in the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves and the 37th MAB-ICC session, co-hosting a side

event on management synergy in Multi-Internationally Designated Areas (MIDAs) and contributing to discussions on youth roles, digitalization and the adoption of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan. The country also marked the 30th anniversary of the East Asian Biosphere Reserve Network (EABRN) by co-publishing a commemorative booklet and co-hosting a capacity-building workshop with the Global Research and Training Centre for Internationally Designated Areas (GCIDA), fostering regional cooperation and knowledge exchange.

189. Mali reported on its ambitious efforts to establish two new biosphere reserves – the Bafing-Falémé Biosphere Reserve, a critical refuge for globally significant biodiversity including West African chimpanzees, Derby's eland, African buffalo and Buffon's kob, and the Gourma Mali Biosphere Reserve, home to Africa's northernmost elephant population, which faces severe threats from poaching and socio-security crises. Both sites, which cover approximately 1.8 million ha and 1.25 million ha respectively, are in advanced stages of designation, with zoning maps finalized for Bafing-Falémé and legislative approval secured for Gourma Mali. The designation of these reserves aligns with the 30x30 KMGBF target and offers significant opportunities for sustainable development through ecosystem services.

190. Mali envisions both biosphere reserves as part of transboundary cooperation initiatives, with Bafing-Falémé potentially becoming a tri-national reserve with Guinea and Senegal, and Gourma Mali forming the basis of bilateral ecological cooperation with Burkina Faso. Mali's commitment to these projects, supported by technical and financial partners, demonstrates its dedication to global natural heritage conservation in the face of complex national challenges.

191. The United Republic of Tanzania reported on its efforts to address soil degradation in the Rufiji-Mafia-Kibiti-Kilwa (RUMAKI) Biosphere Reserve through a UNESCO-aligned Soil Sentinel initiative, involving a multidisciplinary team to establish monitoring systems and promote stakeholder engagement. The United Republic of Tanzania also advanced the nomination of the Tanga-Pemba seascape for inclusion in the UNESCO global network, in collaboration with IUCN and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and is developing a unified General Management Plan for RUMAKI by harmonizing existing individual plans.

192. The United Republic of Tanzania's MAB National Committee identified seven national priorities aligned with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan, focused on strengthening biosphere reserves, promoting sustainable livelihoods, advancing climate resilience, and enhancing youth and women's engagement. The country's implementation of the MAB Programme demonstrates its commitment to balancing biodiversity conservation, sustainable development and scientific research across diverse ecosystems, from forests to coastal and marine environments.

193. Panama is finalizing the establishment of a National MAB Committee through an Executive Decree – a significant step towards formalizing the country's participation in the MAB Programme. Panama has actively engaged in regional cooperation, participating in the XXIII IberoMAB Meeting in Ecuador (May 2026), offering contributions to the adoption of the IberoMAB Action Plan for implementing the Hangzhou Strategy 2026–2035, and celebrating the election of the new IberoMAB Board. Panama also strengthened youth participation within the network, recognizing young people as key actors for the future of biosphere reserves.

194. Panama advanced two new biosphere reserve proposals to protect the biodiversity and cultural heritage of the Caribbean slope – Guna Yala, and Isla Escudo de Veraguas/Humedal Damani-Guariviara – the processes for which have been led by Indigenous and local communities. The country also submitted the nomination dossier for the proposed Coiba Biosphere Reserve, for ICC evaluation in 2027, with the aim of

establishing a future transboundary reserve within the Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor. Additionally, Panama is implementing Phase II of the MangRES project to restore mangroves in Darién, integrating local knowledge with science, and has made progress on Indigenous knowledge projects to enhance governance and sustainable development in La Amistad and other reserves.

195. Spain reported on extensive activities carried out by the country to promote and implement the MAB Programme at both national and international levels. Nationally, the OAPN continued to coordinate the Spanish Committee of the MAB Programme and its advisory bodies – the Council of Managers (55 members) and the Scientific Council (22 members) – while supporting the Spanish Network of Biosphere Reserves (RERB), which comprises 55 sites. The Committee held its ordinary meeting on 18 September 2025, while the Council of Managers and Scientific Council convened in September 2025 and July 2025, respectively. Spain submitted five periodic review reports (Gran Canaria, Alto Bernesga, Sierra de las Nieves, Sierra Nevada and La Siberia) and additional information for La Mancha Húmeda, Las Ubiñas–La Mesa, Muniellos and Valle de Laciana to the MAB Secretariat. The country is also working on new proposals and extensions for evaluation by the MAB Secretariat in September 2026, including the nomination of La Albufera as a new biosphere reserve and extensions to the following sites: Lanzarote, Doñana, Montseny and Terres de l'Èbre. Spain has also launched a participatory process to adapt the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (2026–2035) to the Spanish context, with adoption planned for the 3rd National Congress of Spanish Biosphere Reserves (September 2026) in La Siberia Biosphere Reserve and subsequent approval by the Spanish National Committee in La Palma Biosphere Reserve.

196. Spain also strengthened its legal and governance frameworks, incorporating biosphere reserve status into national legislation (Law 42/2007) and establishing a monitoring indicator system to assess compliance with MAB Programme objectives. To improve governance, the Spanish MAB Committee approved a 'Strategy for Strengthening Compliance' in 2021, ensuring continuous review and alignment with MAB Programme criteria. Internationally, Spain played a leading role in the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves (Hangzhou, September 2025), with high-level participation, including presentations by Sara Aagesen Muñoz (Vice-President), Javier Pantoja Trigueros (OAPN Director), Natalia Beltrán Díaz (Hangzhou SAP spokesperson), Elena Salgado (Abertis Foundation), Georgina Flamme (Abertis Foundation), Alex Cortada (Menorca Biosphere Reserve) and Benedicta Rodríguez (RERB President). Spain maintained its long-standing support for the IberoMAB Network as Secretariat, hosting the XXIII Meeting (Ecuador, May 2026), where the IberoMAB Strategic Action Plan (2026–2035) was adopted, and Paraguay assumed the presidency. Spain also supported training initiatives, including workshops on climate change, biodiversity and financing, and contributed to the EuroMAB, World Network of Mountain Biosphere Reserves (WNMBR), World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves (WNICBR), and MedMAB networks, reinforcing its role as a hub for regional and thematic collaboration.

197. Brazil celebrated its return to the MAB Council, which coincided with the reestablishment of the country's National MAB Committee in 2024. Despite past challenges, Brazil's biosphere reserves remained active due to the dedication of local communities, and the national Youth Network has gained international recognition. Brazil has hosted key MAB events and advanced new UNESCO designations, including the Vitória–Trindade Marine and Chapada Diamantina biosphere reserves, while securing World Heritage inscriptions for Lençóis Maranhenses and Peruaçu River Canyon after a 20-year gap.

198. Brazil emphasized the importance of strengthening governance over the vast biosphere reserves on its territory, viewing the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan as an opportunity to enhance management models. The country is launching a comprehensive review of

the Caatinga Biosphere Reserve to modernize governance and to ensure alignment with the new MAB agenda, leveraging its convergence of UNESCO designations, and reaffirming its commitment to the MAB Programme and international cooperation.

199. Costa Rica reported on the successful implementation of its MAB governance structure under Decree 40692-MINAE, with the National MAB Committee meeting monthly and local management committees holding periodic meetings to foster multi-stakeholder participation. The network celebrated the International Day of Biosphere Reserves in November 2025, awarding the 'Marcas Reservas de Biosfera Costarricenses' seal to local businesses and screening four short films produced with UNESCO Participation Funds. In March 2026, Costa Rica hosted the 4th Meeting of the Youth Network of Costa Rican Biosphere Reserves, focusing on capacity-building and presenting a new communication guide. The 'Marcas' programme received renewed attention, with the Agua y Paz Biosphere Reserve accrediting the most businesses.

200. Costa Rica actively engaged in international forums, including the XXII and XXIII Meetings of the IberoMAB Network, the IberoMAB Training Programme Seminar, and the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves and 37th MAB-ICC meeting in Hangzhou, where the country joined with other participating states in reviewing and approving the Hangzhou Strategy 2026–2035, and supported the development of the IberoMAB Action Plan. Costa Rica submitted the periodic review for the La Amistad Biosphere Reserve and participated in the evaluation of the new MAB virtual platform, highlighting challenges linked to the voluntary nature of most contributors, which can slow progress as their work overlaps with regular responsibilities.

201. Zambia, speaking on behalf of the AfriMAB Regional Network, reported on the 8th Annual General Meeting, held in Zambia in March 2026, under the theme of 'Harnessing Africa's natural resources through ecosystem-friendly technologies'. Key activities included a survey of mining impacts, which revealed negative effects on water, soil and biodiversity; youth-led innovative pilot projects employing AI to address pollution; and the ALBATROSS project, which emphasizes good governance, sustainable financing and Indigenous knowledge. The network also advanced transboundary cooperation in the Mt Elgon Biosphere Reserve (Uganda/Kenya) and the Mono, WAP and TRIDOM regions.

202. The AfriMAB Network highlighted several major challenges, including security threats from armed conflicts, illegal mining, human-wildlife conflicts and severe funding deficits that limit conservation efforts. The network is aligning its Programme of Action with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan through a regional approach, empowering youth and communities, and exploring sustainable funding mechanisms to support its activities.

203. Austria reaffirmed its commitment to the MAB Programme, noting that the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan is increasingly shaping the national MAB community. The country's focus lies on international cooperation and research supported by the UNESCO Chair for Sustainable Management of Conservation Areas. The Austrian MAB National Committee, based at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, secured €540,000 in research funding for two transdisciplinary projects: the first on governance and funding models for conservation and sustainable development, and the second on land use and nature-based solutions for flood risk management. Both projects extend to biosphere reserves in Switzerland reflecting Austria's dedication to transboundary collaboration.

204. At the international level, Austria chairs the five-country Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve and will participate actively in EuroMAB 2026, held in September. The country remains deeply committed to the MAB Programme's values and objectives, and emphasized its eagerness to continue collaborating with all partners in the Council.

205. Guinea presented its activities, highlighting the role of its two research laboratories: the Biodiversity Conservation Laboratory, focused on sustainable resource management and ecosystem-based planning, and the Biosphere Reserves and Sustainable Development Laboratory, which studies the dynamics between local communities and reserves. Key achievements include the validation of zoning for the biosphere reserve candidacy of the Diecké forest, ecological assessments of existing reserves (Monts Nimba, Niger, Badiar, Ziama) and capacity-building for local management committees.

206. Guinea also reported on awareness-raising initiatives for riverine communities and the proposition of research projects with a mining company, focusing on seed banks, rare species propagation and invasive species control. Looking ahead, Guinea is advancing the PICVERT programme, a €5 million regional initiative to create a transboundary biosphere reserve covering 30,000 km², linking biodiversity conservation with the economic development of local communities.

207. Morocco highlighted its commitment to the MAB Programme, underscoring the alignment of national policies with sustainability and inclusive ecosystem development. The country has established a dedicated agency to coordinate development within its oasis and argan biosphere reserves, implementing integrated programmes that improve basic services, promote the socio-economic empowerment of rural women, and support scientific research through international events like the Argan Tree and Oasis Congresses. Morocco also designated a youth representative for the MAB Network and achieved key milestones, including planting 3 million date palms in 2020, with a target of 5 million by 2030. A US$49-million argan tree planting programme was completed in 2025, covering 10,000 ha.

208. Morocco has strengthened cooperation with regional networks (MedMAB, ArabMAB) and national committees, and reaffirmed its support for the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan. The delegation praised the global collaboration in advancing the 2030 SDGs and international commitments, particularly for developing countries and SIDS.

209. Over the past year, Portugal has developed a National MAB Action Plan 2026–2035, a participatory and evidence-based framework aligned with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan, to guide implementation of the MAB Programme across its 13 biosphere reserves (including three transboundary sites with Spain), covering 2.15 million ha and hosting 352,000 inhabitants. The plan focuses on five strategic priorities: biodiversity conservation, ecological transition, knowledge and innovation, education and community engagement, and collaborative governance. Portugal aims to reinforce biosphere reserves as laboratories for sustainable development and innovation, and expressed support for Canada's initiative on UNESCO Arctic sites.

210. Colombia has expanded the number of biosphere reserves on its territory, from five to seven sites, over the past decade. The two newest additions are located in the Chocó Biogeographic region – a global biodiversity hotspot. Tribugá-Cupica-Baudó became Colombia's first Pacific biosphere reserve in 2023, covering diverse ecosystems and home to mostly Emberá and Afro-Colombian inhabitants. The Darién Norte Chocoano Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2024, includes critical marine and terrestrial habitats for Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. This growth consolidates Colombia's leadership in biosphere reserves across Latin America.

211. Colombia's biosphere reserves are advancing governance through initiatives like the GEF-Orinoquía project, which strengthened management committees across all seven sites, and Phase II of the MangRes project, which is restoring mangroves in the Seaflower Biosphere Reserve. Bioeconomy efforts are transforming biodiversity into value added products, from shade-grown coffee in Sierra Nevada to sustainable fishing in Ciénaga Grande, all branded with the Biosphere Reserve label. Research institutes are protecting genetic resources, with Tribugá alone hosting 1,500 endemic species,

while new dialogues aim to expand Cinturón Andino and designate high-mountain páramos – vital 'water factories' – as future reserves. The newly installed Korea-funded Caribbean Oceanographic Research Centre will support marine-coastal biosphere reserves.

212. Togo's National MAB Commission is finalizing a three-year work plan, aligned with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan, and has renewed some of its members with a view to revitalizing its activities. The country is also preparing a nomination dossier for Fazao-Malfakasa Park, highlighting its value for conserving intact forest and savannahs, as well as its potential for research, training and environmental education.

213. Togo reported that little progress has been made on the OTI-Kéran Oti-Madjouri Biosphere Reserve due to the current state of emergency in the region, which was imposed in June 2022 due to terrorist incursions that have displaced local populations and limited the Commission's ability to operate. Togo will approach the Secretariat to explore options to mitigate these impacts and address the delay in submitting the periodic report for the site.

214. Paraguay, speaking on behalf of the IberoMAB Regional Network, reported on the country's active contributions to the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves (Hangzhou, September 2025), including the presentation of the 'Declaration of the Biosphere Reserves of the Network of MAB Committees and Biosphere Reserves of Ibero-America and the Caribbean' and support for IberoMAB Youth in promoting Indigenous and youth engagement through a dedicated stand. At the XXIII Meeting of the Regional Network (Chocó Andino de Pichincha Biosphere Reserve, Ecuador, May 2026), a new Action Plan (2026–2035) was adopted, aligned with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan, and a new Board of Directors was elected, with Paraguay as President, and Peru and Spain as Vice-President and Secretary, respectively. The meeting also approved modifications to the Internal Regulations, enabling the inclusion of a youth representative with voting rights in the Executive Council. In addition, advanced training initiatives were introduced, including a seminar on climate change and biodiversity (above 800 participants) and a virtual course on funding sources (200 participants registered). Key publications included the IberoMAB Action Plan 2026–2035 and a technical guidance document on adaptive management for climate resilience and biodiversity conservation.

215. Bulgaria reaffirmed its strong commitment to the MAB Programme, and confirmed national efforts to actively advance biodiversity research, ecosystem monitoring and conservation biology under the leadership of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Bulgaria expressed support for the implementation of MAB principles through interdisciplinary expertise and collaboration with national institutions, universities and local communities, and highlighted the importance of strengthening the science-policy interface and fostering international cooperation within the WNBR.

216. Argentina reported on significant engagement in the MAB Programme at both international and national levels during 2025–2026. At the global level, Argentina participated in the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves in Hangzhou, China, where the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (2026–2035) was adopted, and attended the 37th session of the MAB-ICC as an observer. At the national level, Argentina continued to serve on the IACBR for the 2023–2026 term, representing the Ibero-American region alongside Colombia. At the domestic level, the National MAB Committee was formalized by Decree No. 749/21, and the National Network of Biosphere Reserves submitted periodic reviews for the Valdés, Riacho Teuquito, Laguna Oca y Herraduras del río Paraguay and Mar Chiquito Biosphere Reserves, of which Laguna Oca y Herraduras del río Paraguay and Las Yungas (follow-up) received approval. The Patagonia Azul Biosphere Reserve also submitted a periodic review in 2025, the results of which are pending.

217. Argentina also prioritized youth engagement, selecting Kevin Alberti as the national youth focal point for the 3rd Global MAB Youth Forum in Italy (May 2026). Sabrina Ceballos from Las Yungas Biosphere Reserve secured a partial scholarship to attend the forum. The country implemented the second cycle of its Biosphere Reserve Indicators System (SiRBA), although participation was limited to 8 out of the 15 national reserves, highlighting opportunities for improved data collection and local stakeholder coordination. Technical assistance, capacity-building and virtual meetings for reserve managers were provided to support periodic reviews and strengthen the network, including updates to the National Network's regulations.

218. Germany reported on the country's robust national and international engagement in the MAB Programme. The German MAB National Committee held two meetings (October 2025 in Schwarzwald and April 2026 in Schaalsee) and continued to advise and support 17 German biosphere reserves, finalizing a revision of national criteria for designation and periodic review processes (published in November 2025) and updating position papers on international cooperation and renewable energies. The German MAB Youth Network, now a registered non-profit, secured annual financial contributions of €500 from each German biosphere reserve for five years and obtained external funding to expand activities, including seminars and international participation at meetings, such as the 3rd Global MAB Youth Forum in Italy. Internationally, Germany drew on the outcomes of the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves, particularly the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan, and maintained active involvement in EuroMAB, including participation in the 2026 EuroMAB Conference in Canada. Germany also provided €10 million annually in international cooperation, supporting projects in the Prespa (Albania/North Macedonia), Trifinio (El Salvador/Guatemala/Honduras), WAP (Benin/Burkina Faso/Niger), Tonle Sap (Cambodia) and Lusatia (Germany) Biosphere Reserves, while renewing partnerships with Volkswagen and Henkel. Additionally, Germany supported capacity-building in Armenia for the establishment of the Dilijan Biosphere Reserve and launched a follow-up project in May 2026 to strengthen the designation process.

219. Thailand presented its National Framework for Biosphere Reserve Management (2022–2032), which guides the country's approach to sustainable development and balanced coexistence between people and nature, aligned with the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economic Model and the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan. Thailand reported that the National Committee, appointed in June 2025 with 27 diverse stakeholders, has supported periodic reviews for four biosphere reserves, advanced studies for two new designations, and promoted BCG-based development in pilot sites such as Ranong and Doi Chiang Dao. Capacity-building efforts have included translating Technical Guidelines into Thai, hosting national workshops and conducting perception surveys. Awareness-raising activities have also been organized to enhance public understanding of biosphere reserves. The five biosphere reserves in the country – Sakaerat, Mae Sa-Kog Ma, Huay Tak Teak, Ranong and Doi Chiang Dao – have demonstrated strong community engagement through environmental education, ecotourism, alternative livelihoods and conservation-based tourism, contributing to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

220. Türkiye reported on its continued commitment to the MAB Programme, noting that the National MAB Committee maintains regular activities to strengthen communication between UNESCO and national authorities. The delegation actively participated in the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves and the 37th MAB-ICC session in Hangzhou, expressing full support for the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (2026–2035) and subsequent implementation. Türkiye appointed Ms Nakış Selcen Denktaş as National MAB Youth Coordinator to enhance youth engagement, and have assured her participation in the 3rd Global MAB Youth Forum (May 2026). The country also advanced the nomination of a second biosphere reserve, in the Yıldız Mountains (114,974 ha), submitted in September 2024 and resubmitted in February 2025, with the IACBR recommending deferral pending further revisions. At the national level, Türkiye is

addressing legislative gaps by preparing a presidential decree to formalize the management of biosphere reserves, while the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks was restructured as a subsidiary institution of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Site-based efforts at the Camili Biosphere Reserve have focused on improving management efficiency through updated legal regulations.

221. **MedMAB** reported on the ongoing activities of the thematic network, which encompasses 72 biosphere reserves across 16 Mediterranean countries, to promote sustainable development, knowledge-based resilience and inclusive governance in alignment with the Lima Action Plan (2016–2025) and the 2023 MedMAB Strategy. In 2025, the network strengthened collective impact through the 4th Mediterranean Biosphere Reserve Managers' Meeting (which welcomed 27 managers from 17 reserves), the launch of a Governance Framework process and the co-creation of the Action Plan 2026–2030, while enhancing visibility via the production of a new video, interactive web map and 11 articles published on the MedMAB website. MedMAB fostered knowledge-based resilience by participating in the RES-MAB (seven Mediterranean biosphere reserves, €4.05 million budget, funded by the Prima partnership) and LIFE Biospher'Adapt (eight French biosphere reserves, €6.7 million budget) projects, organizing side events at the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves on climate adaptation and Water – Energy – Food – Ecosystems (WEFE) nexus approaches contributing to the BECOME (Boosting Circular Economy Expertise through Learning Communities) project report. The network also empowered sustainability through capacity-building initiatives, including the inauguration of the Master SAES (Interdisciplinary Studies in Environmental, Economic and Social Sustainability) at the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (ICTA-UAB) and participation in the European Workshop on Collaboration in UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, reinforcing its role as a bridge between science, policy and practice in the Mediterranean.

ITEM 13 – UPDATE ON THE PROCESS OF EXCELLENCE

222. The Secretariat reported on the implementation of the Process of Excellence and Enhancement of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR), adopted by the MAB-ICC in 2021 to ensure biosphere reserves uphold the standards of the Statutory Framework and serve as models for implementing the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. Since its adoption, the Secretariat received 168 periodic review reports and 59 follow-up submissions from 71 countries between 2022 and 2026. As of June 2026, 96 biosphere reserves, including 3 transboundary sites, are engaged in the Process of Excellence, excluding those affected by conflict or disaster situations.

223. The Secretariat maintained close follow-up with Member States, providing technical support throughout the periodic review and follow-up processes. Seven biosphere reserves in the final year of the Process of Excellence requested one-year extensions to complete their submissions, which the Secretariat proposed to grant on a case-by-case basis, provided sufficient evidence is submitted that work is ongoing and can be finalized within the requested timeframe. For nine biosphere reserves, the Advisory Committee requested additional information beyond the Process of Excellence cycle to determine compliance with the Statutory Framework.

224. The Secretariat highlighted that reporting obligations have been suspended for biosphere reserves in conflict or disaster-affected areas. These sites will be required to submit their periodic reviews within three years after the official end of the conflict or disaster.

225. The Secretariat also noted that five sites submitted periodic reviews in lieu of new nominations before the 30 September 2025 deadline, while three sites submitted

periodic reviews after this deadline for consideration in 2027. The Cuban national authorities informed the Secretariat, both verbally and through electronic messages, that they were unable to transmit the files for the Ciénaga de Zapata and Buenavista biosphere reserves due to technical difficulties resulting from the ongoing energy situation, which is affecting internet connectivity in the country. However, no official written communication to this effect was received by the Secretariat.

226. The Secretariat further reported that six sites did not submit periodic reviews or additional information and may be invited to submit new nominations by 30 September 2026 or 2027. These include Great Nicobar (India), Xirihualtique-Jiquilisco, Apaneca-Ilamatepec and Trifinio Fraternidad (El Salvador), Isla de Ometepe (Nicaragua) and Real Sitio de San Ildefonso – El Espinar (Spain). The Secretariat proposed that the management plan for the Trifinio Fraternidad Transboundary Biosphere Reserve be considered sufficient for the Salvadorian national part of the site, allowing it to meet the criteria.

227. Four biosphere reserves – Utwe in the Federated States of Micronesia, and Hurulu, Kanneliya-Dediyagala Nakiyadeniya and Sinharaja in Sri Lanka – formally requested extensions beyond the Process of Excellence cycle, with deadlines for submission proposed for 2026 or 2027.

228. Finally, the Secretariat noted that six sites, while submitting additional information by the deadline of 15 December 2025, still did not meet the criteria, and that the Advisory Committee had requested further information, with deadlines extending beyond the Process of Excellence cycle. These sites are Djurdjura and Tassili n'Ajjer (Algeria), Achanakmar-Amarkantak, Panchmari and Sundarbans (India), and Somma, Vesuvio and Miglio d'Oro (Italy). If the MAB-ICC decides that these sites do not meet the criteria following the receipt of new information, they will be expected to submit new nominations by 30 September 2027.

229. The Secretariat concluded by noting that three biosphere reserves – Fray Jorge, Redes in Chile, and Picos de Europa in Spain – have successfully graduated from the Process of Excellence and now meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework.

230. France commended the IACBR and the MAB Secretariat for their thorough analyses of biosphere reserves involved in the Process of Excellence. France further emphasized that the process is essential for maintaining the quality of the global network, but expressed concern about the high number of biosphere reserves currently involved, which exceeds 100. France also noted that some biosphere reserves are located in conflict areas and stressed the importance of taking into account the advice of the IACBR when making decisions regarding these sites.

231. France proposed that sites that have submitted a periodic review should be granted a two-year period to submit a new nomination form by 2028. In the absence of a new submission by the end of this period, the site would be removed from the WNBR. France proposed that biosphere reserves located in Iran (Islamic Republic of), as with those of Lebanon, be considered henceforth as conflict or disaster zones under the Process of Excellence**.** France also recommended adopting the recommendations of the IACBR, including those concerning the Trifinio Transboundary Biosphere Reserve. Referring to Table 4 in document SC-26/CONF.238/10, France proposed adhering to the IACBR's proposals regarding extensions, specifying that for the Federated States of Micronesia, a new nomination form must be submitted by 2028, or the site would face removal at the 41st ICC. Referring to Table 5, France agreed with the IACBR recommendation that sites showing no improvement should be removed from the WNBR at the next ICC. Referring to Table 6, France congratulated the biosphere reserves in Chile and Spain for consistently meeting statutory requirements.

232. Japan commended the ongoing work of the MAB Secretariat linked to the large number of biosphere reserves involved in the Process of Excellence. While supporting the maintenance of a network with a large number of biosphere reserves, Japan emphasized the need for flexibility and fairness, and the importance of ensuring that the Process of Excellence continues to be implemented in a manner that enhances the overall quality of the network.

233. The Republic of Korea noted that around 100 biosphere reserves, accounting for 13 per cent of the network, are currently involved in the Process of Excellence. The country highlighted the fact that some biosphere reserves have submitted periodic reviews instead of new nomination files or have requested extensions. With the first cycle now complete, the Republic of Korea stressed the necessity of assessing whether the current process improves quality effectively. The country proposed that improvements to the Process of Excellence be discussed at the next ICC, stressing that the process should extend beyond managing timelines and include measures to support sites. The Republic of Korea requested that the Secretariat prepare data and propose improvements in close consultation with the IACBR for the next ICC. They also noted that extension requests may be accepted if deadlines are clearly defined, as this indicates a willingness to improve. Referring to Table 4, the country proposed a deadline of the end of 2026. The Republic of Korea warned that frequent extensions or modifications could undermine the Process of Excellence and suggested that possible modifications to the process should be considered.

234. Spain congratulated the IACBR and the Secretariat on their analysis of the information. As a country with many biosphere reserves, some of which are involved in the Process of Excellence, working with the Scientific Council, Spain stressed the importance of the procedure as a means to strengthen the credibility of biosphere reserves and the network. Spain expressed the hope that other biosphere reserves would conclude the Process of Excellence and noted that, while additional contributions or options could be explored, the process is meeting its objectives.

235. On behalf of the Bureau, the Rapporteur presented a text proposing that the Secretariat consider a review and refinement of the Process of Excellence. The document is included in Annex 5 of the present report. After several Member States took the floor, Italy, as Vice-Chair for Group I, clarified that the proposal was a non-binding Bureau recommendation addressed to the Secretariat and presented to the Council for information only; the Chair proposed to circulate it for written feedback before formalizing a proposal, an approach echoed by Portugal.

DECISION:

236. **The MAB Council took note of the progress made in the implementation of the Process of Excellence; provided guidance on the situations described above, and considered the status of the sites listed under tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 of document SC-26/CONF.238/10, including possible decisions regarding their continuation within the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.**

237. **For sites listed in Table 1 of document SC-26/CONF.238/10, the MAB Council decided to follow the proposals of the IACBR. For the sites listed in Table 2, the MAB Council decided that periodic reviews submitted by sites will supersede the need for a new nomination. For sites listed in Table 3, the MAB Council decided to adopt the proposals of the IACBR, including that concerning the Trifinio Fraternidad Transboundary Biosphere Reserve. For sites listed in Table 4, the MAB Council decided to follow the IACBR's extension proposals and, in the case of the Federated States of Micronesia, to request submission of a new nomination form by 30 September 2028. If this is not received, the Utwe Biosphere Reserve will be automatically removed from the WNBR at the 41st ICC. For sites listed in**

Table 5, the MAB Council decided to adopt the proposals of the IACBR. If the additional requested information is not received by the proposed deadlines, these biosphere reserves will be invited to submit a new nomination form.

The following sites meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. They are thus no longer part of the Process of Excellence:

- Las Yungas Biosphere Reserve, Argentina (ARLa2002)
- Dalai Lake Biosphere Reserve, China (CNDa2002)
- Jinggangshan Biosphere Reserve, China (CNJi2012)
- Snake Island Biosphere Reserve, China (CNSn2013)
- Wudalianchi Biosphere Reserve, China (CNWu2003)
- Yading Biosphere Reserve, China (CNYa2003)
- El Tuparro Biosphere Reserve, Colombia (COEl1979)
- Trifinio-Fraternidad Biosphere Reserve, El Salvador (SVTr2011)
- Kafa Biosphere Reserve, Ethiopia (ETKa2010)
- Sheka Biosphere Reserve, Ethiopia (ETKa2010)
- Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve, India (INGu2001)
- Miankaleh Biosphere Reserve Iran, Islamic Republic of (IRMi1976)
- Collemeluccio-Montedimezzo Alto Molise Biosphere Reserve, Italy (ITCo1977)
- Dana Biosphere Reserve, Jordan (JODa1998)
- Mujib Biosphere Reserve, Jordan (JOMu2011)
- Babia Gora Biosphere Reserve, Poland (PLBa1976)
- Babia Biosphere Reserve, Spain (ESBa2004)
- Las Ubiñas – La Mesa Biosphere Reserve, Spain (ESLaU2012)
- Munilellos Biosphere Reserve, Spain (ESMu2000)
- Sierra Nevada Biosphere Reserve, Spain (ESSi1986)
- Valle de Laciana Biosphere Reserve, Spain (ESVa2003)

Country	Biosphere reserve	Comments
Albania	Ohrid-Prespa (ALOh2014)	Periodic review does not meet the criteria; action requested by 30 September 2027.
Albania/North Macedonia	Ohrid-Prespa Transboundary (ALMKOh2014)	Periodic review expected by 30 September 2026; otherwise a new nomination file will be requested by 30 September 2027.
Algeria	Djurjura (DZDj1997)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2027 – beyond the Process of Excellence cycle.
	Tassili n'Ajjer (DZTa1986)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2027 – beyond the Process of Excellence cycle.
Argentina	Parque Atlántico Mar Chiquito (ARMa1996)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
	Patagonia Azul ARPa2015	Periodic review does not meet the criteria; action requested by 30 September 2027.

	Riacho Teuquito (ARRi2000)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
	Valdes (ARVa2014)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
Belarus	Berezinsky (BYBe1978)	Periodic review expected by 30 September 2026; otherwise a new nomination file will be requested by 30 September 2027.
Costa Rica	La Amistad CRLa1982	Periodic review to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
Cuba	Ciénaga de Zapata (CUCi2000)	Submission postponed due to exceptional technical constraints arising from the current energy situation in the country. Periodic review to be considered by the MAB-ICC in 2027.
	Buenavista (CUBu2000)	Submission postponed due to exceptional technical constraints arising from the current energy situation in the country. Periodic review to be considered by the MAB-ICC in 2027.
Czechia	Krkonose (CZKr1992)	Periodic review expected by 30 September 2026; otherwise a new nomination file will be requested by 30 September 2027.
	Bile Karpathy (CZBí1996)	Periodic review expected by 30 September 2026; otherwise a new nomination file will be requested by 30 September 2027.
Czechia / Poland	Krkonose/Karkonosze (CZPLKr1992)	Periodic review expected by 30 September 2026; otherwise a new nomination file will be requested by 30 September 2027.
El Salvador	Xirihualtique-Jiquilisco SVXi2007)	New nomination file expected by 30 September 2027.
	Apaneca-Ilamatepec (SVAp2007	New nomination file expected by 30 September 2027.
Ethiopia	Lake Tana (ETLa2015)	Periodic review expected by 30 September 2026; otherwise a new nomination file will be requested by 30 September 2028.
Ghana	Songor (GHSo2011)	Submitted for consideration in 2027.
Guinea-Bissau	Boloma Bijagós (GWBo1996)	Periodic review expected by30 September 2026; otherwise a new nomination file will be requested by 30 September 2028.
Honduras	Cacique Lempira, Señor de las Montañas	Periodic review expected by30 September 2026; otherwise a new

	(HNCa2015)	nomination file will be requested by 30 September 2028.
India	Achanakmar Amarkantak (HNCa2015)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026 – beyond the Process of Excellence cycle,
	Great Nicobar (INGr2013)	New nomination file to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
	Nilgiri (INNi2000)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
	Nokrek (INNo2009)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
	Panchmari (INPa2009)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026 – beyond the Process of Excellence cycle.
	Sundarbans (INSu2001)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026 and 30 September 2027 – beyond the Process of Excellence cycle.
Indonesia	Siberut (IDSi1981)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
	Taka Bonerate – Kepulauan Selayar (IDTa2015)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
Ireland	Dublin Bay (IDTa2015)	Periodic review to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
Italy	Somma, Vesuvio and Miglio d'Oro (ITSo1997)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026 and 30 September 2027 – beyond the Process of Excellence cycle.
Kazakhstan	Aksu-Zhabagly (KZAk2015)	Periodic review to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
Korea, Democratic People's Republic of	Mount Chilbo (KPMo2014)	Periodic review to be submitted by 30 September 2026; otherwise a new nomination file will be requested by 30 September 2027.
Madagascar	Mananara-Nord (MGMa1990)	Periodic review to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
	Sahamalaza-Iles Radama (MGSa2001)	Periodic review to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
Mexico	Alto Golfo de California y El Pinacate (MXAl1993)	Periodic review to be submitted by 30 September 2026; otherwise a new nomination file will be requested by 30 September 2027.
	El Cielo	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026.

	(MXEl1986)	
	Islas Marías (MXEl1986)	New nomination file to be submitted by 30 September 2027.
	Islas Marietas (MXIs2008)	New nomination file expected by 30 September 2027
	Los Volcanes (MXLo2010)	New nomination file expected by 30 September 2027.
	Montes Azules (MXMo1979)	New nomination file expected by 30 September 2027.
	Naha-Metzabok (MXMo1979)	New nomination file expected by 30 September 2027.
	Sierra Gorda (MXSi2001)	New nomination file expected by 30 September 2027.
	Sierra La Laguna (MXSi2003)	New nomination file expected by 30 September 2027.
Micronesia (the Federated States of)	Utwe (FMUt2005)	New nomination file expected by 30 September 2028.
	And Atoll (FMAn2007)	Periodic review to be submitted for consideration in 2027.
Nicaragua	Isla de Ometepe (NIOm2010)	New nomination file expected by 30 September 2027.
North Macedonia	Ohrid-Prespa (ALMKOh2014)	Periodic review expected by 30 September 2026; otherwise a new nomination file will be requested by 30 September 2027.
Palau	Ngaremeduu (PWNg2005)	Periodic review submitted for consideration in 2027.
Paraguay	Bosque Mbaracayu (PYBo2000)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
	El Chaco (PYEl2005)	The national authority informed the Secretariat that they will submit a new nomination dossier in 2026.
Peru	Huascaran (PEHu1977)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
Poland	Krkonose/Karkonosze (PLKr1992)	Periodic review expected by 30 September 2026; otherwise a new nomination file will be requested by 30 September 2027.
Portugal	Meseta Ibérica (PTMe2015)	Periodic review to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
Portugal/Spain	Meseta Ibérica Transboundary (ESPTMe2015)	Periodic review to be submitted by 30 September 2026.

Russian Federation	Nerusso-Desnyanskoye Polesye (ESMe2015)	Additional information expected by 30 September 2027; otherwise a new nomination file will be requested by 30 September 2028.
	Great Volzhsko-Kamsky (RUGr2005)	Additional information expected by 30 September 2027; otherwise a new nomination file will be requested by 30 September 2028.
Saint Kitts and Nevis	St Mary's (KNSt2011)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
Senegal	Delta du Saloum (SNDe1980)	Periodic review to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
Slovenia	Škocjan Caves (SITh2004)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2027.
Spain	La Mancha Húmeda (ESMa1980)	New nomination file to be submitted by 30 September 2027.
	Meseta Ibérica (ESMe2015)	Periodic review expected by 30 September 2026.
	Real Sitio de San Ildefonso – El Espinar (ESRe2013)	New nomination file expected by 30 September 2026.
	Sierra de Cazorla, Segura y las Villas (ESLa1983)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
	Sierra de Grazalema (ESGr1977)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
Sri Lanka	Bundala (LKBu2005)	Periodic review to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
	Hurulu (LKHu1977)	Requested to submit a periodic review in December 2026.
	Kanneliya-Dediyagala Nakiyadeniya (LKKa2004)	Requested to submit a periodic review in December 2026.
	Sinharaja (LKSi1978)	Requested to submit a periodic review in December 2026.
Thailand	Huay Tak Teak (THHa1977)	Periodic review submitted for consideration in 2027.
	Ranong (THRa1997)	Periodic review submitted for consideration in 2027.
	Sakaerat (THSa1976)	Periodic review to be submitted by 30 September 2026.
Togo	Oti Keran – Oti Mandouri (TGOt201)	Additional information to be submitted by 30 September 2026; otherwise a new

		nomination file will be requested by 30 September 2028.
Uganda	Queen Elizabeth (UGQu1977)	Additional information requested by 30 September 2026 and 30 September 2028.
Uruguay	Bañados del Este (UYBa1976)	Periodic review expected by 30 September 2026; otherwise a new nomination file will be requested by 30 September 2027.
	Bioma Pampa-Quebradas del Norte (UYBi2014)	Periodic review expected by 30 September 2026; otherwise a new nomination file will be requested by 30 September 2027.
Viet Nam	Red River Delta (VNRe2004)	Additional information requested by 30 September 2027 and 30 September 2028.

Biosphere reserves in (post)conflict or (post)disaster areas:

Country(ies)	Biosphere reserve
Belarus/Poland/Ukraine	West Polesie Transboundary (UABYPLWe2003)
Belarus	Belovezskaya Pushcha (BYBe1993)
Cameroon	Waza (CMWa1979)
Central African Republic	Basse-Lobaye (CFBa1977)
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Kavir (IRKa1976)
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Touran (IRTo1976)
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Urmia (IRLa1976)
Lebanon	Jabal al Rihane (LBJa2007)
Niger	Aïr Ténéré (NEAï1997
Sudan	Radom (SSRa1979)
Syrian Arab Republic	Al-Lajat (SYLa2009)
Ukraine	Roztochya (UARo2019)
Yemen	Bura'a (YEBu2011)

ITEM 14 – PERIODIC REVIEW REPORTS AND FOLLOW-UP INFORMATION RECEIVED SINCE THE 36TH MAB-ICC

238. The Secretariat introduced document SC-26/CONF.238/11, which contained recommendations for the periodic review reports and follow-up recommendations examined at the 32nd session of the Advisory Committee. The Secretariat informed the MAB Council that the Advisory Committee had reviewed 34 periodic review reports from 18 countries, 26 follow-ups from 9 countries and 1 withdrawal from 1 country. Detailed recommendations and requests for additional information, as specified in Annexes 1 and 2 of document SC-26/CONF.238/11, were transmitted to Member States for follow-up. The additional information was due by 15 May 2026 for consideration by the Bureau and MAB Council.

239. The Secretariat highlighted a number of individual cases and underlined the fundamental role of the management plan as a core instrument for the effective governance and stewardship of biosphere reserves. The Secretariat further elaborated on several cases falling under the Process of Excellence.

240. France acknowledged that the revision of forms, processes and the simplification of procedures had been widely requested by biosphere reserves and national committees, but stressed that such changes must under no circumstances undermine the quality of individual biosphere reserves or the integrity of the WNBR as a whole. France emphasized the fundamental importance of full respect for the Seville Framework and called for any revisions to take into account the Process of Excellence and its role. France proposed amendments to the draft recommendations.

241. The Republic of Korea recalled earlier requests to review the periodic review process, raised at previous Council sessions, and noted that recommendations to simplify and streamline the periodic review form, in alignment with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan and the new online platform, were timely and appropriate. The delegation emphasized that the Secretariat should present a revised process to the Council no later than the next ICC session. They further expressed support for expanding the size of the IACBR, in order to adequately address the growing workload, the increasing number of periodic reviews and demands associated with the introduction of the new online platform.

242. Guinea thanked the IACBR and the Secretariat for the clarity and quality of the documents submitted. The delegation aligned itself with France’s position, affirming that any review of the process must preserve the quality of the WNBR. Guinea asked for clarification on two procedural questions regarding the appropriate course of action for cases where no decision can be reached on a specific periodic review, and whether established rules and procedures exist for the voluntary withdrawal of a biosphere reserve from the WNBR.

243. Canada expressed support for simplifying the periodic review process, noting that similar requests have been made by own biosphere reserves across its territory, and aligned itself with France in stressing that any such efforts must respect the Statutory Framework. Canada supported the structural changes proposed as part of this process, highlighting their relevance in the context of digitalization, and underlined the need to update the Technical Guidelines accordingly. Canada also suggested that the Secretariat draw on comparable UNESCO mechanisms for guidance, citing in particular the geopark checklist, and proposed that similar tools be considered in the revision of the periodic review process.

244. Italy supported Canada’s proposal to examine existing UNESCO models, emphasizing the importance of building on procedures proven to be effective within the Organization. The delegation reaffirmed its commitment to contribute to efforts aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the periodic review process.

245. Colombia concurred with France, Italy and the Republic of Korea regarding the importance of simplifying the periodic review process without compromising compliance with the statutory framework, and emphasized that the periodic review should serve as a tool for mutual support, enabling biosphere reserves to learn from one another. Colombia called for a more systematic approach with differentiated timeframes and criteria, allowing for gradual and continuous reporting rather than a single comprehensive submission at the end of a ten-year cycle, noting that the new digital platform now makes this feasible and reduces ambiguity and misunderstanding in data reporting. Colombia further suggested that regional networks could play an active role in conducting internal reviews, proposing that IberoMAB take forward this work at the regional level.

246. In response to Colombia's suggestion, France acknowledged that regional networks could contribute to reflections, but cautioned that it would be problematic to introduce standards that are not aligned with the scale of the WNBR as a whole, and that this approach should not lead to differing standards by country or region, as this would undermine the spirit of the programme and the network. France reaffirmed the importance of full respect for the Seville Framework as the common reference for all biosphere reserves.

247. The United Republic of Tanzania aligned itself with Italy, France and others in supporting modifications to the periodic review process, with reference to the procedures applied under the UNESCO Global Geoparks Programme. The delegation suggested adopting a similar approach, including a shorter reporting cycle, and proposed that a validation process every four years at the national level could prove useful as a model for a streamlined periodic review framework.

248. Portugal expressed support for a review of the Process of Excellence, noting that digitalization and emerging technologies offer opportunities to improve efficiency for both biosphere reserves and their stakeholders, and could contribute to greater transparency and consistency across the WNBR. Portugal emphasized, however, that any refinements to the Process of Excellence must respect the unique nature of the MAB Programme, recognizing that biosphere reserves operate in highly diverse contexts and under different governance arrangements. Portugal cautioned against simply replicating approaches from other UNESCO or UN programmes and instead called for the selective adoption of good practices and lessons learned that are appropriate to the specific characteristics and functions of the Programme.

249. The Chair took note of the different views expressed by delegations on the draft recommendations and proposed the establishment of a contact group. Colombia, France, the Republic of Korea and other interested delegations participated in the contact group, which convened during the break and reported back to the plenary.

250. Reporting on behalf of the contact group, France confirmed that agreement had been reached on the key points. The group concurred that the Statutory Framework must be respected and not amended, while good practices may be drawn from other UNESCO networks where relevant, provided the specific features of the MAB Programme are preserved. The contact group further agreed that the ten-year periodic review should be understood as an opportunity to mobilize stakeholders, reflect on experience and set directions for the coming decade, rather than as a burden. No further changes to the draft recommendations were proposed.

251. Spain thanked the contact group for its work and fully aligned itself with France's position, affirming the need to respect the Statutory Framework and the Seville Strategy. Spain emphasized that the MAB Programme must maintain its principles and identity, and that while synergies with other UNESCO programmes are welcome, they should not compromise the Programme's distinct character.

252. In response to the interventions, the Secretariat proposed a drafting correction to the recommendations. Regarding the question raised by Guinea on cases where criteria are not met, the Secretariat explained that additional information is requested from the relevant Member State, and that upon receipt of satisfactory information, the site is considered to meet the criteria. On the question of voluntary withdrawal, with reference to the case of Mount Carmel, the Secretariat clarified that the procedure consists of the Council taking note of a request freely expressed by the country through an official letter.

DECISION:

253. **The MAB Council requested the MAB Secretariat, in consultation with the Advisory Committee, to present a draft proposal for revision of the periodic review form and process to the 39th session of the MAB-ICC, with the objective of simplifying reporting requirements and strengthening alignment with the Seville Statutory Framework and the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (2026–2035).**

254. **The MAB Council invited the MAB Secretariat to review the composition and size of the IACBR, in order to ensure it remains fit for purpose and able to effectively address the growing workload, and – if appropriate – to submit a present a draft proposal for its modification for consideration by the 39th MAB-ICC session.**

255. **The MAB Council endorsed the Advisory Committee recommendations contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/11 without any modifications, for the countries and sites set out below:**

Periodic reviews:

i. Wienerwald, Austria (ATWi2005)
ii. Bogda, China (CNBo1990)
iii. Dalai Lake, China (CNDa2002)
iv. Jinggangshan, China (CNJi2012)
v. Shankou Mangrove, China (CNSh2000)
vi. Fujian Wuyishan, China (CNWu1987)
vii. Yading, China (CNYa2003)
viii. Yancheng, China (CNYa1993)
ix. West Estonian Archipelago, Estonia (EEWe1990)
x. Archipelago Sea Area, Finland (FIAr1994)
xi. Gorges du Gardon, France (FRGo2015)
xii. Ledro Alps, Italy (ITLe2015)
xiii. Po Delta, Italy (ITPo2015)
xiv. Dana, Jordan (JODa1998)
xv. Inlay Lake, Myanmar (MMIn2015)
xvi. Babia Gora, Poland (PLBa1976)
xvii. Alto Bernesga, Spain (ESAl2005)
xviii. Gran Canaria, Spain (ESGr2005)
xix. Kristianstad Vattenrike, Sweden (including re-zoning) (SEKr2005)
xx. Langbiang, Viet Nam (VNLa2015)

Follow-up:

i. Las Yungas, Argentina (ARLa2002)
ii. El Tuparro, Colombia (COEl1979)
iii. Gulf of Mannar, India (INGu2001)
iv. Miankaleh, Iran (Islamic Republic of) (IRMi1976)
v. Babia, Spain (including re-zoning) (ESBa2004)
vi. Valle De Laciana, Spain (ESVa2003)

Voluntary withdrawal:

i. Mount Carmel Biosphere Reserve, Israel

256. **The MAB Council took the following decisions based on the Advisory Committee recommendations contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/11 (see Annex 3), following the deliberations of the Bureau and taking into account additional information received by the MAB Council for the sites and countries below**:

Periodic reviews

257. **Ohrid-Prespa Biosphere Reserve (Albania) (ALOh2014).** The MAB Council endorsed the recommendation of the Advisory Committee and concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Council requested that the Albanian authorities undertake the following actions and report back to the MAB Secretariat by **30 September 2027**:

a. Ensure adequate core funding for biosphere reserve coordination, including support for a dedicated biosphere reserve management and implementation unit, in order to enhance the reserve's overall performance and impact.
b. Submit a comprehensive biosphere reserve management plan, in line with the Statutory Framework, the Technical Guidelines for Biosphere Reserves and the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan, to ensure balanced implementation of all three biosphere reserve functions.
c. Establish a dedicated governance body for the biosphere reserve with appropriate institutional and executive capacities, composed of diverse stakeholder and interest groups, to ensure that all biosphere reserve functions are equally represented and supported.
d. Strengthen cooperation with the North Macedonian section of the Ohrid-Prespa Transboundary Biosphere Reserve, ensuring a balanced implementation of the three functions, operationalizing a cross-border coordination body and actively participating in the WNBR, with particular attention to the Pamplona recommendations.
e. Provide accurate and up-to-date biosphere reserve maps.
f. Submit the international transboundary biosphere reserve periodic review dossier, based on joint efforts conducted by both national biosphere reserve teams.

258. The MAB Council also endorsed the recommendation of the Advisory Committee that the authorities consult the Technical Guidelines for Biosphere Reserves, seek support from established biosphere reserves in Albania and the wider Balkan region, draw on

experience gained within the WNBR, and request technical assistance from the MAB Secretariat to ensure that all actions align with the criteria of the MAB Programme.

259. **Belezma Biosphere Reserve (Algeria) (DZBe2015).** The Advisory Committee was unable to determine whether the site meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. Therefore, the Advisory Committee requested that the national authorities submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by 15 May 2026:

    a. A comprehensive explanation of the revised zonation and the proposed extension, including clarification as to whether the extension of the core area has formal legal protection status, an assessment of the impacts of the zonation changes on the three functions of the biosphere reserve (conservation, development and logistic support), and a revised version of the table under section i of the summary offering a clear comparison between the areas indicated in the original nomination file and the proposed changes.

    b. A land use map that matches the boundaries of the extended biosphere reserve.

    c. Copies of the successive management plans referred to in the dossier and a clear explanation of their coverage, specifically whether they refer to the biosphere reserve as a whole (i.e. all three zones) or only to the legally protected areas. If such management plans do not exist, the authorities are requested to provide a workplan for the participatory preparation and adoption of a management plan.

    d. Detailed information about the road crossing part of the biosphere reserve (including the core area and buffer zone), the related impact on the fragmented natural habitats and any mitigation measures undertaken to address these effects.

    e. Detailed information regarding the impacts on natural resources habitats, biodiversity and the quality of life of local populations of quarrying activities and energy production at the solar energy station in Oued El Ma, as well as any adopted mitigation measures, if relevant.

    f. Detailed information regarding the impacts of extensive tourism activities, taking into account the tenfold increase in tourist numbers over the last decade.

260. The national authorities explained that the proposed extension aligned with the ICC recommendation following initial designation and concerned only the transition area. They also clarified that a management plan (2026–2039) is currently being developed and will provide a detailed assessment of the three functions of the biosphere reserve, set the fundamental and strategic orientation of the entire site, and establish objectives to be achieved for the next 15 years. After reviewing the information provided by the national authorities, the MAB Council decided that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requested the national authorities to forward a copy of the management plan upon adoption to the MAB Secretariat.

261. **Patagonia Azul Biosphere Reserve (Argentina) (ARPa2015).** The Advisory Committee concluded that the Patagonia Azul Biosphere Reserve does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requested that the national authorities submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by 15 May 2026:

    a. A detailed justification of the revised zonation, including the criteria and methodology used to redefine boundaries, and a clear explanation as to how ecological connectivity and functional integration between the core, buffer and transition areas are ensured.

b. The development and formal approval of a strategic management plan for the biosphere reserve, encompassing core areas, buffer zones and transition areas. This plan should include a comprehensive timetable and incorporate a system of measurable indicators for conservation, sustainable development and effective governance, taking into consideration the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan.

c. An explanation as to how the sustainability strategy created by the Sub-secretariat of Conservation and Protected Areas will support the integrated management of the entire biosphere reserve, particularly with regard to fostering sustainable development in non-core areas, and ensuring coherence and alignment across all zones to effectively fulfil the conservation and development functions of the site.

d. Clarification of the budget framework, specifying the period covered, the allocation of resources across biosphere reserves zones and the corresponding functions, and initiatives that remain unimplemented due to financial constraints, together with measures envisaged to ensure long-term financial sustainability.

e. Updated information on biodiversity monitoring, including recent assessments and the development of indicators for ecosystem services, as well as measures taken in response to wildlife health risks, such as the 2022 avian influenza outbreak.

f. Clarification of the population size of the biosphere reserve, both overall and by zone, as differing figures are reported.

g. A structured description of stakeholders at national, provincial and local levels, indicating their roles in governance and management.

262. The MAB Council noted that no management plan is currently in place, and that the work plan provided did not include specific timelines. After reviewing the information provided by the national authorities, the MAB Council decided that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requested the national authorities to provide by **30 September 2027** a more detailed explanation as to how the management plan will be developed, approved and adopted.

263. **Snake Island – Laotie Mountain Biosphere Reserve (China) (CNSn2013).** The Advisory Committee was unable to determine whether this biosphere reserve meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requested the concerned authority to submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by 15 May 2026:

a. A valid management plan for the biosphere reserve (or a detailed English summary hereof).

b. A zonation map and vegetation map with readable coordinates and information including proper legends in English, French or Spanish.

c. Shapefiles for the site.

264. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee recommended that the concerned authority use the biosphere reserve's location as a key migratory hub along the East Asia – Australasia Flyway to strengthen financial and technical support for raptor research and protection, and create a coordination mechanism or network for monitoring migratory birds in the Dalian area.

265. The Advisory Committee also encouraged the authorities to harmonize the management of the biosphere reserve and the World Heritage site, with a view to creating synergies and adding value.

266. The national authorities provided a management plan with an English translation, zonation and vegetation maps, and narrative responses on flyway and raptor

conservation and research, as well as World Heritage management liaison. After reviewing the information provided by the national authorities, the MAB Council decided that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework.

267. **Wudalianchi Biosphere Reserve (China) (CNWu2003).** The Advisory Committee was unable to determine whether this biosphere reserve meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and asked the concerned authority to submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by 15 May 2026:

    a. An explanation as to how the Wudalianchi Scenic Area Nature Reserve Management Committee can act as a responsible governance body for the Wudalianchi Biosphere Reserve, including the reason why the committee carries this name.

    b. A detailed explanation for the significant population decrease over the past decade.

268. The Advisory Committee also requested the authorities to submit the following information missing from the periodic review form to the MAB Secretariat by 15 May 2026:

    a. An updated list of land use and management/cooperation plans.

    b. Shapefiles for the site.

    c. Signed agreements granting non-exclusive rights to UNESCO for the use of photos and videos from the site.

269. The national authorities provided a detailed explanation of governance arrangements and population development. After reviewing the information provided by the national authorities, the MAB Council decided that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework.

270. **Sheka Biosphere Reserve (Ethiopia) (ETSh2012).** The Advisory Committee was unable to determine whether this biosphere reserve meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and asked the concerned authority to submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by 15 May 2026:

    a. A zonation map with an appropriate legend to address inconsistencies in the sizes of the three zones (sizes shown in the zonation map are not the same as the sizes stated in the report).

    b. A detailed budget for the management of the biosphere reserve, rather than approximate values.

    c. The revised Management Plan referenced in the periodic review report, covering all three zones.

271. The national authorities provided an updated zonation map and explained that a revised management plan including a budget will be provided by 31 August 2026. After reviewing the information provided by the national authorities, the MAB Council decided that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework and asked the national authorities to send a copy of the management plan upon adoption to the MAB Secretariat.

272. **Kafa Biosphere Reserve (Ethiopia) (ETKa2010).** The Advisory Committee was unable to determine whether this biosphere reserve meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and asked the concerned authority to submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by 15 May 2026:

    a. A clearer current zonation map for 2024, alongside the 2010 nomination map, to illustrate changes in core, buffer and transition areas.

b. Clear timelines for updating and implementing the existing management plan.

c. A detailed budget for the management of the biosphere reserve, with specific allocations for each zone rather than total approximate values.

273. The national authorities provided an updated zonation map and explained that a revised management plan including budget will be provided by 31 August 2026. After reviewing the information provided by the national authorities, the MAB Council decided that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework and asked the national authorities to send a copy of the management plan upon adoption to the MAB Secretariat.

274. **Tuscan Islands Biosphere Reserve (Italy) (ITTu2003).** The Advisory Committee was unable to determine whether this biosphere reserve meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and requested the concerned authority to submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by 15 May 2026:

a. A map clearly indicating the overlap between the biosphere reserve designation and the Tuscan Archipelago National Park.

b. Clarification of apparent discrepancies in population numbers between Table 2.2.3 on p. 24 and Table J on p. 15.

c. A copy of the executive summary of the Biosphere Reserve Action Plan 2021–2025 (management plan) in English, French or Spanish.

275. Finally, the Advisory Committee recommended the development of new marine core areas over the next ten years, as the present core area represents a very small percentage (1 per cent) of the total biosphere reserve area.

276. The national authorities provided all the information requested. After reviewing the information provided by the national authorities, the MAB Council decided that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework.

277. **Collemeluccio-Montedimezzo Alto Molise Biosphere Reserve (Italy) (ITCo1977).** The Advisory Committee was unable to determine whether the site meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, due to the lack of a specific management or action plan for the biosphere reserve. The Advisory Committee therefore requested the authorities to submit an outline for the management plan covering the entire biosphere reserve to the MAB Secretariat by 15 May 2026.

278. The Advisory Committee recommended that the biosphere reserve adopt a participative approach to the development of the plan, drawing on existing partial management plans, incorporating elements of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan and following closely the Technical Guidelines for Biosphere Reserves. The Advisory requested the authorities to submit a complete management plan to the MAB Secretariat by 30 September 2028.

279. Despite evidence of adequate participation in the governance of the biosphere reserve, the Advisory Committee further recommended the establishment of a specific management/implementation unit to improve all governance processes and enhance the positive impacts of the biosphere reserve on the region.

280. The national authorities provided a detailed timeline of the process to develop an action plan. After reviewing the information provided by the national authorities, the MAB Council decided that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework.

281. **Mujib Biosphere Reserve (Jordan) (JOMu2011).** The Advisory Committee was unable to determine whether the site meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory

Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. Therefore, the Advisory Committee requested that the national authorities submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by 15 May 2026:

a. A comprehensive explanation of the revised zonation and extension, including their impacts on the three functions of the biosphere reserve, accompanied by an updated zonation map and a revised table of area changes (section Summary i).

b. A single shapefile prepared in accordance with MAB guidelines, correcting identified inconsistencies (including overlaps with the West Bank border and overlaps between polygons).

c. Detailed information on environmental impact assessments and mitigation measures related to mining, quarrying, oil extraction, unsustainable agriculture and overgrazing, water pollution and increased visitor pressure.

282. The Advisory Committee also requested the authorities to submit the following information not submitted in the periodic review form to the MAB Secretariat by 15 May 2026:

a. A list of relevant legal documents.

b. A list of land use and management/cooperation plans.

c. Updated vegetation and land cover maps corresponding to the revised boundaries.

d. An updated list of fauna.

e. A list of key bibliographic references.

283. The Advisory Committee further recommended that the authorities provide supporting documentation and photos and videos of implemented activities, including conservation and monitoring.

284. The national authorities explained that the extension of the transition area was undertaken in response to the ICC recommendation upon designation, acknowledging that the extension was not submitted at that time. The authorities also clarified that the management plan covered the entire biosphere reserve including the extended transition area. After reviewing the information provided by the national authorities, the MAB Council decided that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework.

285. **Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve (South Africa) (ZAGo2015).** The Advisory Committee was unable to determine whether the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, due to the absence of a comprehensive management plan for the entire biosphere reserve. Therefore, the Advisory Committee requested that the national authorities submit a management plan outline for the entire biosphere reserve to the MAB Secretariat by 15 May 2026. The Advisory Committee further requested the authorities to submit a full management plan for the entire biosphere reserve by 30 September 2028.

286. The Committee further recommended that the biosphere reserve authority make continuous efforts to manage the competing demands for water and land use, specifically regarding invasive alien plant management and river/wetland health.

287. The national authorities provided a management plan outline for the entire biosphere reserve and explained that a full management plan would be provided by 30 September 2028. After reviewing the information provided by the national authorities, the MAB Council decided that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework.

288. **Magaliesberg Biosphere Reserve (South Africa) (ZAMa2015).** The Advisory Committee was unable to determine whether the Magaliesberg Biosphere Reserve meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves due to the absence of a comprehensive management plan for the entire biosphere reserve. Therefore, the Advisory Committee requested that the national authorities submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by 15 May 2026:

    a. A zonation map specifying the exact location of legal and illegal mining activities.

    b. An updated management plan outline including measures that address the effects of mining on the biosphere reserve.

289. The Advisory Committee further requested the authorities to submit a full management plan for the entire biosphere reserve to the MAB Secretariat by 30 September 2028.

290. The national authorities provided a zonation map indicating legal and illegal mining sites along with an updated management plan outline addressing mining impacts. They explained that a full management plan would be provided by 30 September 2028. After reviewing the information provided by the national authorities, the MAB Council decided that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework.

291. **Queen Elisabeth Biosphere Reserve (Uganda) (UGQu1977).** The Advisory Committee was unable to determine whether the site meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requested the authorities to submit the following information by 15 May 2026:

    a. An updated table that clearly indicates the new proposed terrestrial core area(s) and area of the new terrestrial buffer zones in hectares, aligned with the table on page 7 of the periodic review.

    b. A revised zonation map of the biosphere reserve that clearly depicts only the three designated zones – the core area, buffer zone and transition area.

    c. An outline of a management plan for the entire biosphere reserve.

    The Advisory Committee further requested the authorities to submit a full management plan for the entire biosphere reserve to the MAB Secretariat by 30 September 2028.

292. The Advisory Committee further recommended that the biosphere reserve authority strengthen the participation of local communities in the development and management of the biosphere reserve and increase awareness among stakeholders of the importance of reducing pressure on resources.

293. As no additional information was submitted by the national authorities, the MAB Council **could not determine** whether the site meets the criteria of the Statutory Framework. The MAB Council requested the national authorities to submit the additional information by **30 September 2026**.

294. **Red River Delta Biosphere Reserve (Viet Nam) VNRe2004.** The MAB Council endorsed the recommendation of the Advisory Committee and concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Council requested the authorities to develop and submit a workplan for the development of the management plan by **30 September 2027** and the complete integrated management plan by **30 September 2028**.

295. The Council also endorsed the Advisory Committee's recommendation that the three provinces responsible for managing the Red River Delta Biosphere Reserve optimize and strengthen the inter-provincial co-management mechanism and establish a stable coordination framework with the relevant managing staff.

Follow-up on the Recommendations of periodic reviews

296. **Tassili N'Ajjer Biosphere Reserve (Algeria) (DZTa1986).** The MAB Council concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requested the authorities to submit a new periodic review file as well as the following elements by **30 September 2027**:

    a. Clarification regarding the zonation discrepancies and a shapefile consistent with the map.

    b. A comprehensive management plan for the entire biosphere reserve.

    c. Documentation confirming the establishment of a coordination committee for the biosphere reserve.

    The Council encouraged the authorities to consult with the relevant officers and focal points in the UNESCO Office in Rabat to seek guidance on these matters.

297. **Djurjura Biosphere Reserve (Algeria) (DZDj1997).** The MAB Council concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requested the authorities to submit a detailed and operational management plan for the biosphere reserve by **30 September 2027**. This plan should properly incorporate coordination and synergies with existing national plans, policies and strategies, and clearly define mechanisms for the meaningful involvement of local communities living within the biosphere reserve.

298. **Las Yungas Biosphere Reserve (Argentina) (ARLa2002).** After reviewing the Strategic Action Plan and the supporting documentation, the MAB Council concluded that the biosphere reserve **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

299. **El Tuparro Biosphere Reserve (Colombia) (COEl1979).** After reviewing the additional information, the MAB Council concluded that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

300. **Achanakmar Amarkantak Biosphere Reserve (India) (INAc2012).** The MAB Council concluded that the site still **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and called on the national authorities to submit the information requested at the 31st meeting of the IACBR in 2025 to the MAB Secretariat by **30 September 2026**.

301. **Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve (India) (INGu2001).** After reviewing the submitted information, the MAB Council concluded that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

302. **Panchmari Biosphere Reserve (India) (INPa2009).** The MAB Council concluded that the site still **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and called on the national authorities to submit the information requested at the 31st meeting of the IACBR in 2025 to the MAB Secretariat by **30 September 2026**.

303. **Sundarbans Biosphere Reserve (India) (INSu2001).** The MAB Council concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and called on the national authorities to submit the information requested at the 31st meeting of the IACBR in 2025 to the MAB Secretariat by

30 September 2026 (items a, b, c and e) and a management plan (item d) by **30 September 2027**.

304. **Kavir Biosphere Reserve (Iran, Islamic Republic of) (IRKa1976).** The MAB Council concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. As the Kavir Biosphere Reserve is included on the list of sites in conflict areas, the MAB Council recommended that the national authorities submit the periodic review information no more than three years after the official recognition of the end of the conflict in the area.

305. **Miankaleh Biosphere Reserve (Iran, Islamic Republic of) (IRMi1976).** After reviewing the additional information, the MAB Council concluded that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Miankaleh Biosphere Reserve is included on the list of sites in conflict areas.

306. **Touran Biosphere Reserve (Iran, Islamic Republic of) (IRTo1976).** The MAB Council concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. As the Touran Biosphere Reserve is included on the list of sites in conflict areas, the MAB Council recommended that the national authorities submit the periodic review information no more than three years after the official recognition of the end of the conflict in the area.

307. **Urmia Biosphere Reserve (Iran, Islamic Republic of) (IRLa1976).** The MAB Council concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. As the Urmia Biosphere Reserve is included on the list of sites in conflict areas, The MAB Council recommended that the national authorities submit the periodic review information no more than three years after the official recognition of the end of the conflict in the area.

308. **Somma, Vesuvio and Miglio d'Oro Biosphere Reserve (Italy) (ITSo1997).** The MAB Council concluded that the biosphere reserve **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requested the authorities to provide the following information by **30 September 2026**:

    a. A workplan and draft outline of the biosphere reserve management and communication plan.

    b. Further clarification of the roles and commitments of the members of the Institutional Board, with their endorsement letters.

    c. Further details of visitor carrying capacity and sustainable economic development research and action, including documentation, agreements or links to published reports or decisions.

    d. Further information about measures taken to address the dumping of illegal waste in the biosphere reserve and the National Park.

309. The MAB Council also requested the authorities to provide the following information by **30 September 2027**:

    a. A completed management and communication plan, including details of stakeholder participation and consultation, a fundraising plan and a dedicated budget.

310. **El Cielo Biosphere Reserve (Mexico) (MXEl1986).** After reviewing the additional information sent by the national authorities, the MAB Council concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requested the national authorities to submit the consolidated management plan for the whole biosphere reserve, aligned with the newly proposed zonation, to the MAB Secretariat by **30 September 2026.**

311. **Islas Marías Biosphere Reserve (Mexico) (MXIs2010).** After reviewing the additional information received in response to the following requested elements:

    a. Concrete evidence of effective mechanisms for the inclusion and active participation of mainland coastal communities in the governance, planning and implementation of the (MAB) biosphere reserve, including their representation within the management body and the socio-economic benefits derived from biosphere reserve designation.

    b. Formal clarification and supporting documentation demonstrating the full integration of the transition area in the management plan of the (MAB) biosphere reserve.

312. The MAB Council noted that, although the national authorities reported increased collaboration with mainland communities, they provided no evidence of their formal participation in the governance of the biosphere reserve. In addition, the transition area remains outside the area covered by the management plan, although the national authorities indicated that a revision is currently underway. The MAB Council therefore concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. As the site has reached the final year of the Process of Excellence, the Council invited the authorities to submit a new nomination file by 30 September 2027.

313. **Islas Marietas Biosphere Reserve (Mexico) (MXIs2008).** After reviewing the additional information requested by the Advisory Committee – including the final version of the management plan, documentation demonstrating the full integration of the transition area within the plan, and clarification regarding the presence of a resident population (including an updated map and information on community participation in governance) – the MAB Council noted that the national authorities had clarified the situation regarding the resident population and governance arrangements. However, the national authorities have yet to submit an updated management plan incorporating the transition area, or an updated map showing the resident population and human settlements.

314. The MAB Council therefore concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. As the site has reached the final year of the Process of Excellence, the Council invited the authorities to submit a new nomination file by 30 September 2027.

315. **Los Volcanes Biosphere Reserve (Mexico) (MXLo2010).** After reviewing the additional information requested by the Advisory Committee – including formal clarification and supporting documentation demonstrating the full integration of the transition area into the management plan, and concrete evidence of effective contributions to decision-making processes on the part of the Biosphere Reserve Advisory Council and other stakeholders, including management actions and programme revisions that take into consideration their recommendations – the MAB Council noted that the national authorities had provided strong evidence of stakeholder participation through the local council and its sub-councils. However, the transition area remains outside the boundaries of the area covered by the management plan, although national and site-level processes are underway to address this issue.

316. The MAB Council therefore concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. As the site has reached the final year of the Process of Excellence, the Council invited the authorities to submit a new nomination file by 30 September 2027.

317. **Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve (Mexico) (MXMo1979).** After reviewing the additional information requested by the Advisory Committee – including clarification and supporting documentation demonstrating the full integration of the transition area into the management plan of the biosphere reserve, as well as concrete evidence of effective contributions to decision-making processes on the part of the Biosphere Reserve

Advisory Council and other stakeholders, including management actions and programme revisions that take into consideration their recommendations – the MAB Council noted that the national authorities provided strong evidence of stakeholder participation through the Biosphere Reserve Advisory Council and activities undertaken in the reserve's area of influence. However, the transition area remains undefined and is not formally integrated into the management plan, although revision processes are underway at both site and national levels.

318. The MAB Council therefore concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. As the site has reached the final year of the Process of Excellence, the Council invited the national authorities to submit a new nomination file by **30 September 2027**.

319. **Naha-Metzabok Biosphere Reserve (Mexico) (MXNa2010).** After reviewing the additional information requested by the Advisory Committee – including formal clarification and supporting documentation demonstrating the full integration of the transition area into the Biosphere Reserve Management Programme – the MAB Council noted that the national authorities had provided evidence of activities implemented in the area of influence that contribute to sustainable development and conservation objectives. However, the transition area is not included in the management plan and has not been formally integrated into the management framework.

320. The MAB Council therefore concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. As the site has reached the final year of the Process of Excellence, the Council invited the authorities to submit a new nomination file by 30 September 2027.

321. **Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve (Mexico) (MXSi2001).** After reviewing the information requested by the Advisory Committee, the MAB Council noted that national authorities provided documentation on extractive activities, mining monitoring mechanisms and territorial planning:

    a. Clear documentation identifying extractive activities that are authorized and supervised within the biosphere reserve, together with evidence demonstrating compliance with applicable environmental regulations, for consideration by the ICC.

    b. An updated map showing the location of extractive activities in relation to the biosphere reserve zonation.

    c. Detailed information on the development and implementation of a robust monitoring system for mining operations, including measures to address illegal mining activities and to mitigate associated environmental impacts, in line with previous ICC recommendations.

    d. Comprehensive information on the promotion and operationalization of territorial planning mechanisms, including intergovernmental agreements, demonstrating how land use conflicts are addressed and how collaboration across different administrative and socio-economic contexts is ensured in an equitable and effective manner.

    e. A formal clarification and supporting documentation demonstrating the full integration of the transition area into the Management Programme of the biosphere reserve, both legally and in terms of planning.

322. However, the MAB Council noted that the transition area remains insufficiently integrated into management and there is limited evidence of activities fulfilling its sustainable development function. Updated planning instruments are still under preparation. The MAB Council therefore concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. As the site has reached the

final year of the Process of Excellence, the Council invited the authorities to submit a new nomination file by 30 September 2027.

323. **Sierra La Laguna Biosphere Reserve (Mexico) (MXSi2003).** After reviewing the additional information requested by the Advisory Committee – including a formally approved zonation scheme clearly identifying the transition area in accordance with the MAB criteria and an updated management plan aligned with the three-zone structure of the biosphere reserve and the functions defined under the Statutory Framework – the MAB Council noted that a formally defined transition area and zonation scheme have been clarified and mapped. However, the transition area remains outside the management plan, and the updated management plan aligned with the three-zone structure has not yet been approved.

324. The MAB Council therefore concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. As this site has reached the final year of the Process of Excellence, the Council invited the authorities to submit a new nomination file by 30 September 2027.

325. **El Chaco Biosphere Reserve (Paraguay) (PYEl2005).** The MAB Council acknowledged the official communication from the national authorities confirming their intention to maintain the biosphere reserve while undertaking a comprehensive revision of its boundaries, zonation, structure and governance arrangements. It took note that a new nomination form reflecting these adjustments is expected in September 2026 and that support has been offered by the MAB Programme during this process.

326. Considering the absence of updated documentation within the current review cycle, the MAB Council concluded that the biosphere reserve **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

327. **Babia Biosphere Reserve (Spain) (ESBa2004).** After reviewing the additional information revised by the Advisory Committee, the MAB Council concluded that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and approved the re-zoning proposal.

328. **La Mancha Húmeda Biosphere Reserve (Spain) (ESMa1980).** The MAB Council noted the significant progress made, including the establishment of the Participation Body and Scientific Council and ongoing work on the zoning revision and management plan. However, the formal approval of the zoning modification, the compliance assessment with improvement proposals and the duly approved management plan have not been submitted.

329. The MAB Council therefore concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. As this site has reached the final year of the Process of Excellence, the Council invited the authorities to submit a new nomination file by 30 September 2027.

330. **Las Ubiñas-La Mesa Biosphere Reserve (Spain) (ESLaU2012).** The Advisory Committee concluded that the site does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requested the national authorities to prepare a formally approved zonation map and official documentation, confirming the establishment, operationalization and regulation of the management committee and its regulation, to be submitted to the MAB Secretariat by 15 May 2026.

331. The national authorities provided a newly approved map as well as official documentation confirming the establishment, operationalization and regulation of the management committee. After reviewing the additional information, the MAB Council concluded that

the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

332. **Muniellos Biosphere Reserve (Spain**) (**ESMu2000)**. After reviewing the information requested by the Advisory Committee – including clarification of the governance body formally responsible for approving the management plan, confirmation that the plan will be adopted in accordance with the governance framework of the WNBR, and submission of the approved plan to the MAB Secretariat – the MAB Council noted that the national authorities had clarified the responsible governance body and submitted the management plan, which was formally adopted by the Participation Forum of the Biosphere Reserve in April 2026.

333. After reviewing the additional information, the MAB Council concluded that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

334. **Valle de Laciana Biosphere Reserve (Spain) (ESVa2003).** After reviewing the additional information revised by the Advisory Committee, the MAB Council concluded that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

ITEM 15 – PROPOSALS FOR NEW BIOSPHERE RESERVES AND EXTENSIONS/ MODIFICATIONS/RENAMING OF BIOSPHERE RESERVES THAT FORM PART OF THE WORLD NETWORK OF BIOSPHERE RESERVES (WNBR)

335. The Secretariat introduced the proposed new biosphere reserves. The Secretariat referred to document SC-26/CONF.238/12 (see Annex 4), recalling that at its 32nd meeting held in Paris from 9 to 13 February 2026, the Advisory Committee examined seventeen (17) proposals for new biosphere reserves, and five (5) requests for an extension/modification of an existing biosphere reserve. He also noted that three (3) requests for a renaming of existing biosphere reserves were examined as part of the periodic review process.

336. The MAB Bureau met on 3 June 2026 and decided that for sites recommended for approval, the Advisory Committee's recommendations would be forwarded to the Council without any change. In some cases, the Advisory Committee had recommended that further information be sought from Member States for submission by 15 May 2026. The additional information received by the MAB Secretariat by that date was subsequently reviewed by the MAB Bureau for submission to the Council for its final decision. The MAB Bureau's recommendations were then presented to the 38th MAB-ICC on 4 June 2026 and were followed by presentations from representatives on the biosphere reserves approved for designation.

DECISION:

337. **Taking into account the recommendations of the Advisory Committee for biosphere reserves, as contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/12 (see Annex 4) and the Bureau's further deliberations, the MAB-ICC took the following decisions**:

A. New designations

338. **Shkodër Lake (Albania) (ALSh2026).** The MAB Council welcomed this proposal from Albania. Based on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee contained in

document SC-26/CONF.238/12, the MAB Bureau examined the additional information sent by the authorities, as per the Advisory Committee's request, namely:

a. An outline for the Albanian Shkodër Lake Biosphere Reserve Management Plan.

b. Details of any risk assessments or environmental impact assessments carried out on major extractive or polluting industries in the transition area, as well as plans to monitor and mitigate the associated risks.

c. An updated map with labels indicating the main municipalities.

339. The authorities provided details of environmental impact assessments, and demonstrated a decreased approval rate of permits for extractive industries within the transition area.

340. A vision document for a management plan, rather than an outline, was also provided, as well as a revised map including municipalities, but not the proposed zonation.

341. As the information received was satisfactory, the MAB Council **approved** the site.

342. **Theniet El Had (Algeria) (DZTi2026).** The MAB Council welcomed this re-submitted proposal from Algeria. Based on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/12, the MAB Bureau examined the additional information sent by the authorities, as per the Advisory Committee's request, namely:

a. Clarification and justification for the presence of a small core area surrounded by a transition area at the northern tip of the proposed site.

b. An explanation as to how the integrity of the proposed core area bordering the site in its northern section can be maintained without negative impacts from neighbouring areas (e.g. protected areas designated in these areas).

c. Reclassification of the proposed 422-ha core area in the southern part as a buffer zone. Since this wetland area may be vulnerable, the Advisory Committee encouraged the authorities to seek appropriate legal protection and consider requesting a change in core area zonation in the future.

d. Submission of a shapefile reflecting these changes and clarifications, following the guidelines established by the MAB Secretariat: a single shapefile with core areas, buffer zones and transition areas as polygons, with no overlaps or gaps.

e. An explanation of the role of local communities in the management of the proposed biosphere reserve.

f. Submission of a bibliography and letters of endorsement for the proposed site.

343. The authorities clarified the information on zoning, explaining that topography plays a buffering role in places where the core area borders the site.

344. The proposed core area in the southern part of the site was reclassified as a buffer zone, the authorities highlighting a relict population of Cuvier's gazelles in the area, with a commitment to their legal protection extending beyond simple zoning (e.g. safe road traffic and population monitoring).

345. Detailed information was provided on the role of local communities in the management of the proposed site (e.g. surveillance, sustainable production, management of pastoralism, solidarity tourism and a local coordination committee).

346. An extensive bibliography and letters of support were provided.

347. As the information received was satisfactory, the MAB Council **approved** the site.

348. **Aruba Island (Aruba) (AWAr2026).** The MAB Council welcomed this first biosphere reserve proposal submitted by Aruba. Based on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/12, the MAB Bureau examined the additional information sent by the authorities, as per the Advisory Committee's request, namely:

a. A clearer and more detailed description of the terrestrial and marine core areas, including current activities taking place within these areas, and the explicit identification and naming of all legally designated core areas.

b. A revised and coherent zoning description and cartographic representation, including a single unified zoning map, clearly demonstrating how the buffer zones surround and protect core areas and clarifying the extent of the transition area, including whether and how marine areas within the EEZ are designated as marine transition areas, in full alignment with the zoning categories of the MAB Programme.

c. A complete and updated set of maps, including land use and vegetation maps, with coordinates, scale, north arrows and legends, as well as any missing shapefiles supporting these maps.

d. Additional information on stakeholder engagement, including how communities, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, private sector actors, youth groups and other stakeholders were involved throughout the process, the number of meetings or consultations held, and any communication or outreach activities undertaken to inform and engage with the wider public.

e. Integration of the objectives and actions of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan into the proposed integrated management framework of the biosphere reserve.

349. The authorities provided additional information clarifying the terrestrial and marine core areas, including their legal status, ecological characteristics and current activities taking place within these areas.

350. Additional cartographic material, including updated land use and vegetation maps, was also submitted.

351. The authorities further provided a revised zoning map identifying terrestrial and marine core, buffer and transition areas.

352. Additional information was also submitted regarding stakeholder consultations and participatory processes, including consultations with marine users, local stakeholders and youth groups.

353. The MAB Council further noted with satisfaction the integration of the objectives and actions of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan into the proposed integrated management framework of the biosphere reserve.

354. As the information received was satisfactory, the MAB Council **approved** the site and encouraged the authorities to continue strengthening the participatory governance framework and to further strengthen the zoning approach in future management and reporting processes.

355. **Great Caucasus (Azerbaijan) (AZGr2026).** The MAB Council welcomed this new biosphere reserve proposal submitted by Azerbaijan and endorsed all the recommendations of the Advisory Committee as contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/12 without amendment. The MAB Council **approved** the site.

356. **Takamanda-Cross River Gorilla (Cameroon) (CMTa2026).** The MAB Council welcomed this biosphere reserve proposal submitted by Cameroon. Based on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/12, the MAB Bureau examined the additional information sent by the authorities, as per the Advisory Committee's request, namely:

a. A management plan outline for the proposed biosphere reserve.

b. Updated population figures for the entire biosphere reserve.

357. The authorities provided a management plan for the Takamanda National Park and its Peripheral Zone and clarified that a management plan outline for the entire site would be provided by 30 September 2028.

358. Updated population data were also provided for each zone of the proposed biosphere reserve.

359. As the information received was satisfactory, the MAB Council **approved** the site.

360. **Quebec City (Canada) (CAQu2026).** The MAB Council welcomed this biosphere reserve proposal submitted by Canada. Based on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/12, the MAB Bureau examined the additional information sent by the authorities, as per the Advisory Committee's request, namely:

    a. A justification as to whether the protection status of proposed core areas listed in the Directory of Protected Natural Environments, which are based on the voluntary conservation initiatives, is sufficient to enable and support core area functions.

    b. A more detailed explanation of how the core areas proposed in the urban areas fulfil the standards and functions of core areas or whether their classification as stand-alone buffer zones would be more appropriate, potentially leading to changes in the proposed zonation.

    c. More detailed information on how the buffering functions are provided where the core areas are not surrounded by formal buffer zones.

361. The authorities provided a description of Canada's registry of voluntary conservation areas, which includes private conservation areas, as well as detailed figures on the present state, monitoring and evaluation of biodiversity and ecosystem functioning in urban core areas.

362. The authorities also clarified that 89 per cent of the core areas are surrounded by buffer zones, with a territorial planning exercise having resulted in a zonation based on ecological connectivity.

363. As the information received was satisfactory, the MAB Council **approved** the site.

364. **Dalankuh-Qamishlou (Iran, Islamic Republic of) (IRDa2026).** The MAB Council welcomed this new biosphere reserve proposal submitted by the Islamic Republic of Iran and endorsed all the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, as contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/12 without amendment. The MAB Council **approved** the site and requested the authorities to finalize the full management plan for the site through a consultative process by **30 September 2028.**

365. **Tost Toson Bumbiin Nuruu (Mongolia) (MNTo2026).** The MAB Council welcomed this biosphere reserve proposal submitted by Mongolia. Based on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/12, the MAB Bureau examined the additional information sent by the authorities, as per the Advisory Committee's request, namely:

    a. A detailed outline and timeline demonstrating how the current management plans for the core areas, buffer zone and transition areas will be integrated into a common management framework.

    b. A justification for the proposed exclusion of parts of the transition area to the east and north of the buffer zone.

366. The authorities provided a detailed timeline for management actions, organized by key actors, zones and anticipated time of implementation.

367. A detailed justification for the proposed zonation was also provided, supported by maps showing the setting of the proposed biosphere reserve within a wider protected areas landscape providing buffering functions beyond the biosphere reserve boundaries.

368. As the information received was satisfactory, the MAB Council **approved** the site.

369. **Skadar Lake Watershed (Montenegro) (MESk2026).** The MAB Council welcomed this biosphere reserve proposal submitted by Montenegro. Based on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/12, the MAB Bureau examined the additional information sent by the authorities, as per the Advisory Committee's request, namely:

    a. An updated zonation map with clear labels for municipalities, to facilitate understanding among external audiences of the relationship with the text.

    b. An explanation of the connectivity of the remote Nikšić municipality.

    c. Environmental impact assessments, monitoring and/or plans to mitigate the risks caused by extractive and polluting industries in the transition area.

    d. A map showing the proposed neighbouring Albanian biosphere reserve, to justify the provided zonation related to core areas along the border.

370. The authorities provided updated maps for municipalities showing both sides of the border. They explained that Nikšić is located upstream in the watershed and, as such, provides important ecosystem services to the main body of the proposed biosphere reserve. The municipalities between Nikšić and the rest of the site have not yet agreed to join the proposed biosphere reserve but hope was expressed that they would.

371. The authorities also clarified that resource extraction was limited in 2017 and further regulated in 2023, including crackdowns on illegal extraction.

372. As the information received was satisfactory, the MAB Council **approved** the site.

373. **Sur del Alto Paraná (Paraguay) (PYSu2026).** The MAB Council welcomed this biosphere reserve proposal submitted by Paraguay. Based on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/12, the MAB Bureau examined the additional information sent by the authorities, as per the Advisory Committee's request, namely:

    a. A revised zoning proposal including an expanded buffer zone, or an explanation for how the buffer zoning configuration will effectively fulfil its protective and supportive functions for both core areas, reduce anthropogenic pressures and enhance ecological connectivity within the Upper Paraná Atlantic Forest ecoregion.

    b. A management plan outline which will:

        i. include a more detailed analysis of the urban economy of the city of Presidente Franco and its interaction with the biosphere reserve, including industrial and domestic waste management, wastewater treatment systems and environmental quality standards for air, water and soil;

        ii. integrate the objectives and actions of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan into the proposed integrated management framework of the biosphere reserve;

        iii. provide detailed information on current productive models applied to agricultural and livestock activities within the proposed biosphere reserve, specifying whether these activities follow intensive, extensive, regenerative or other relevant approaches;

        iv. incorporate regulatory and normative information concerning the use of agrochemicals, pesticides and related inputs, including applicable legal frameworks, control and monitoring mechanisms, and existing guidelines, with particular attention to their potential direct and indirect impacts on water resources, soils and biodiversity, especially in areas adjacent to the core areas; and

v. indicate whether mechanisms will be established to promote youth participation in the governance of the biosphere reserve, including the possible creation of a youth network.

374. The authorities provided a new zoning map presenting larger buffer areas, together with a corresponding justification regarding their protective and supportive functions for the core areas, a reduction of anthropogenic pressures and enhancement of ecological connectivity within the Upper Paraná Atlantic Forest ecoregion.

375. Detailed information was submitted regarding the city of Presidente Franco, addressing each of the aspects requested, as well as the incorporation of all 34 objectives of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan into the proposed integrated management framework of the biosphere reserve.

376. The authorities further provided a table and detailed information on the type of productive activity developed in each region of the biosphere reserve, organized according to the categories indicated in the request.

377. A list of the current laws and regulations applicable to the use of agrochemicals, pesticides and related inputs was also submitted. The authorities clarified that current regulations would continue to be applied by the same competent bodies, but in a more coordinated manner once the management plan of the biosphere reserve is approved.

378. Regarding youth participation, the authorities indicated that the biosphere reserve will create a youth network and ensure youth representation in the management body.

379. As the information received was satisfactory, the MAB Council **approved** the site and encouraged the authorities to continue strengthening the integrated management framework of the biosphere reserve, in particular through the timely adoption of the management plan, the consolidation of coordinated regulatory implementation across competent bodies and the operationalization of mechanisms for youth participation in the governance of the site.

380. **Serra da Estrela (Portugal) (PTSe2026).** The MAB Council welcomed this biosphere reserve proposal submitted by Portugal. Based on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/12, the MAB Bureau examined the additional information sent by the authorities, as per the Advisory Committee's request, namely:

a. A formal commitment to integrate active mining activities into the management instruments of the biosphere reserve, including the incorporation – where available – of environmental impact assessments (EIAs) for active sites (e.g. Panasqueira, Gonçalo and Seixo Amarelo), as well as a technical assessment of the compatibility of extractive activities with the conservation objectives of the MAB Programme, particularly in relation to water resources.

b. Information on projected expansion and new mining developments within the proposed biosphere reserve.

c. A single shapefile containing three distinct polygons corresponding to the core area(s), buffer zone(s) and transition area(s).

381. The authorities provided additional information confirming a formal commitment to integrate active mining activities into the management instruments of the biosphere reserve. This includes the formalization of partnership protocols with all active mining concessionaires, their guaranteed representation within the Community Forum, and the systematic integration of active EIAs, environmental impact statements) and environmental licences into the action plan of the biosphere reserve. The authorities clarified that all active mining operations are located exclusively within the transition area, outside the Serra da Estrela Natural Park and the Natura 2000 Special Conservation Zone, in line with the zoning principles of the MAB Programme.

382. The authorities further detailed the national legal framework governing extractive activities, together with the site-specific environmental status of the active operations, including the conditionally favourable EIA decisions for the Alvarrões (Gonçalo and Seixo Amarelo) and Covão (Benespera) concessions, and the Environmental Licence for the extraction and preparation of metallic ores at the Panasqueira mine facility, including continuous water treatment and monitoring system already in place. A technical assessment was submitted demonstrating the compatibility of these activities with the conservation objectives of the MAB Programme.

383. Regarding projected mining developments, the authorities provided information on the approved expansion of the Alvarrões mine, the reorganized Covão concession and the long-term operational authorization of the Panasqueira mine. They further noted the explicit exclusion of UNESCO-designated areas, including biosphere reserves, from national lithium prospecting areas, as well as the rejection of the Argemela concession following an inadequate impact assessment, as evidence of the robustness of the regulatory safeguards applicable to the territory.

384. The corresponding shapefiles were also submitted.

385. As the information received was satisfactory, the MAB Council **approved** the site.

386. **Matibay na Bayan ng Sablayan (the Philippines) (PHMa2026).** The MAB Council welcomed this biosphere reserve proposal submitted by the Philippines. Based on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/12, the MAB Bureau examined the additional information sent by the authorities, as per the Advisory Committee's request, namely:

    a. An explanation as to how the integrity of the two terrestrial core areas will be maintained without negative impacts from neighbouring areas (e.g. presence of neighbouring designated protected areas), given the absence of buffer or transition areas for certain boundaries of the core areas adjacent to the administrative boundaries.

    b. Clarification regarding the 'disputed area' indicated on 'Map 13: Terrestrial zonation map' (p. 95) and 'Map 34: Boundary Dispute Map' (p. 224) in the nomination form, including any possible impacts that the disputed area and 'the resource access and management conflicts' mentioned in Section 17.2.1 may have on management of the proposed biosphere reserve.

    c. An updated version of the submitted Integrated Matibay na Bayan ng Sablayan Management Plan 2026–2035 reflecting the zonation change in a transition area (Municipal Waters).

    d. The appropriate 'signature on behalf of the MAB National Committee or focal point' appended in Section 5.5, in place of the signature of the Municipal Mayor.

387. The authorities provided detailed information and maps demonstrating core area integrity where core areas abut the site boundaries, clarifying that the concerned core areas border strict protection zones in adjacent protected areas.

388. The status of the disputed area was also clarified and the commitment of stakeholders to the biosphere reserve concept was confirmed.

389. The authorities provided an updated management plan as well as an updated signature of the MAB National Committee.

390. As the information received was satisfactory, the MAB Council **approved** the site.

391. **Nino Konis Santana (Timor-Leste) (TLNi2026).** The MAB Council welcomed this first biosphere reserve proposal submitted by Timor-Leste and endorsed all the recommendations of the Advisory Committee as contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/12 without amendment. The MAB Council **approved** the site.

392. **Phong Nha – Ke Bang (Viet Nam) (VNPh2026).** The MAB Council welcomed this new biosphere reserve proposal submitted by Viet Nam and endorsed all the recommendations of the Advisory Committee as contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/12 without amendment. The MAB Council **approved** the site.

B. Deferrals

393. **Alto Paraguá – Marfil (Bolivia, Plurinational State of) (BOAl202x).** The MAB Council welcomed the submission by Bolivia of this application and endorsed all the recommendations of the Advisory Committee as contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/12 without amendment. The MAB Council concluded that the nomination should be **deferred** and encouraged the authorities to resubmit the nomination file with the following information:

a. A revised zoning proposal and cartographic representation, including an updated zoning map, demonstrating how core areas of high conservation value are effectively surrounded or directly protected by adjacent buffer zones, ensuring coherence with the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and the zoning principles of the MAB Programme, and explaining how this revised configuration minimizes human pressures while allowing for compatible and carefully managed sustainable uses.

394. **Vitória – Trindade Marine (Brazil) (BRVi202x).** The MAB Council welcomed the submission by Brazil of this application and endorsed all the recommendations of the Advisory Committee as contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/12 without amendment. The MAB Council concluded that the nomination should be **deferred** and encouraged the authorities to resubmit the nomination file with the following information:

a. A detailed description of the exact human population for each zone of the biosphere reserve, including numbers and spatial distribution.

b. Confirmation of the total surface area expressed in hectares in accordance with the revised proposal.

c. A comprehensive description of the proposed governance model, ensuring alignment with the new zoning scheme and the objectives of the actors operating within the biosphere reserve, clarifying the nature of the future body responsible for management of the biosphere reserve, outlining how partnerships and collaboration mechanisms with all relevant stakeholders will be strengthened to enhance their effective participation in biosphere reserve governance, and ensuring compliance with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan and the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

d. An outline of the management plan, integrating existing planning instruments and management frameworks applicable to the area, including an explanation of the management mechanisms foreseen for the different zones of the proposed biosphere reserve, incorporating considerations related to the presence of international waters.

e. Details of current social and ecological dynamics, as well as further information on how Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) were involved in the preparation of the biosphere reserve nomination process.

f. Clarification as to how research, education and capacity development initiatives within the territory contribute to the three functions of the biosphere reserve.

g. A high-quality map and corresponding shapefiles clearly delineating the three zones of the proposed biosphere reserve, including a justification for the apparent exclusion of a small portion of Trindade Island observed in the shapefiles received, and an explanation of the status of this area and its zone of influence in the final zonation map.

h. Details of measures being taken to mitigate the impacts of port activities and fishing associated with the proposed zonation of the biosphere reserve, and confirmation as to whether a monitoring model is envisaged.

i. With regard to the development of mining activities, the Advisory Committee acknowledges the delimitation of current and potential maritime concession zones within the proposal for the new biosphere reserve, and therefore requests the authorities to submit a maritime appendix on mining activities within the proposed biosphere reserve, including:

    i. Clarification of the applicable legal framework for extractive industries, specifying whether existing concessions are subject to current regulations or prohibitions on mining in protected areas, and the implications for each zone of the biosphere reserve;

    ii. Approved extraction plans validated and supervised by the competent authorities, including timelines and detailed descriptions of activities;

    iii. A certificate of compliance with the environmental license or equivalent, supported by relevant documentation;

    iv. Environmental monitoring and follow-up reports related to extractive activities in the area;

    v. A management strategy to prevent, mitigate or minimize conflicts between extractive activities and conservation objectives within the proposed biosphere reserve;

    vi. Clear restrictions on extractive activities, especially in core areas, to protect biodiversity and marine ecosystems.

j. A description of the strategy to ensure effective inclusion of youth in the activities of the biosphere reserve.

395. **Central Polissia (Ukraine) (UKCe202x).** The MAB Council welcomed the submission by Ukraine of this application and endorsed all the recommendations of the Advisory Committee as contained in document SC-26/CONF.238/12 without amendment. The MAB Council concluded that the nomination should be **deferred** and encouraged the authorities to resubmit the nomination file with the following information:

a. An explanation of how the development function will be implemented within the proposed site.

b. A map clearly showing the overlap between the proposed biosphere reserve boundaries and zones and those of the Exclusion Zone.

c. A comprehensive outline of the management plan for the biosphere reserve, based on the goals presented in the nomination dossier.

d. Clarification of the composition of the biosphere reserve governance body, including the roles of different stakeholders, proposed staffing capacities and an appropriate budget with dedicated funding for biosphere reserve coordination.

e. An explanation as to how proximity to the nuclear disaster site will influence or affect the balanced implementation of all biosphere reserve functions.

f. Information on whether, and in what ways, military training areas may impact the surrounding proposed biosphere reserve, especially its biodiversity.

C. Extensions, re-zoning, renaming

396. **Hanma-Huzhong Biosphere Reserve (China) (CNHa2015).** The MAB Council welcomed the proposal for the extension and renaming of Hanma-Huzhong, originally designated in 2015 as the Hanma Biosphere Reserve, and endorsed all the recommendations of the Advisory Committee as contained in document 26/CONF.238/12 without amendment. The MAB Council **approved** the extension and took note of the additional information received.

397. **Po Grande Biosphere Reserve (Italy) (ITPo2019).** The MAB Council welcomed the proposal to extend the Po Grande Biosphere Reserve, and endorsed all the recommendations of the Advisory Committee as contained in document 26/CONF.238/12 without amendment. The MAB Council **approved** the extension.

398. **La Siberia Biosphere Reserve (Spain) (ESLa2019).** The MAB Council welcomed the proposal to extend the La Siberia Biosphere Reserve, and endorsed all the recommendations of the Advisory Committee as contained in document 26/CONF.238/12 without amendment. The MAB Council **approved** the extension.

399. **Sierra de las Nieves Biosphere Reserve (Spain) (ESSi1995).** The MAB Council welcomed the proposal for the extension, partial rezoning and renaming of the Sierra de las Nieves Biosphere Reserve, and endorsed all the recommendations of the Advisory Committee as contained in document 26/CONF.238/12 without amendment. The MAB Council **approved** the extension.

400. **Sierra Nevada Biosphere Reserve (Spain) (ESSi1986).** The MAB Council welcomed the proposal for the extension and partial adjustment of the zoning scheme of the Sierra Nevada Biosphere Reserve, and endorsed all the recommendations of the Advisory Committee as contained in document 26/CONF.238/12 without amendment. The MAB Council **approved** the extension.

401. **The World Network of Biosphere Reserves now comprises 797 biosphere reserves in 145 countries including 24 transboundary sites.**

ITEM 16 – OTHER MATTERS

402. Interventions on the Process of Excellence are summarized under Item 13.

403. The Secretary invited participants to join in paying tribute to a colleague and champion of MAB values, Francisco Cantos, renowned for his expertise and generosity, and who has dedicated much of his life to advancing the Programme's objectives and strengthening the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

404. Panama, speaking on behalf of the IberoMAB network, also offered a tribute.

ITEM 17 – DATE AND LOCATION OF THE 39TH SESSION OF THE MAB-ICC

405. The Secretariat invited delegates to submit proposals for hosting the next session of the MAB-ICC. He noted that no hosting proposal for the next ICC had yet been received, and that if none were submitted, the meeting would be held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris.

406. France highlighted the difficulties associated with late announcement of the ICC location and stressed the importance of earlier notification.

407. The Secretary acknowledged this and committed to setting a date around June, mentioning that the present year was exceptional with two Member States (Greece and Paraguay) proposing to host the session. Portugal expressed gratitude to Paraguay for its hospitality.

ITEM 18 – ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE 38TH SESSION OF THE MAB-ICC

408. The Secretariat submitted the draft report of the 38th session of the International Coordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB-ICC) for the Council's consideration.

409. The Rapporteur informed delegates that a complete version, incorporating all agenda items, would be circulated within two weeks for comments and possible amendments and it was agreed that the Members of the MAB Council would have additional time to send any remaining comments or input to the MAB Secretariat, for inclusion in the final version of the report, as appropriate.

410. The Chair proposed the preliminary adoption of the report.

411. Brazil stated that the report could either be adopted or not adopted, while France supported Brazil's position, highlighting that there was dissensus on certain topics and suggesting the need for a mechanism, such as a 'virtual Friends of the Chair' group, to facilitate further exchange where the Secretariat deemed it necessary.

412. Austria accepted the procedure but recommended that, in the future, there be a clearer distinction between minutes (statements) and recommendations, with consensus established paragraph by paragraph for recommendations.

ITEM 19 – CLOSURE OF THE SESSION

413. The Secretary expressed gratitude to the delegates and to Paraguay for hosting the meeting and for making the participants feel at home. The Secretary highlighted the progress in increasing the number of biosphere reserves, consolidating partnerships and welcomed the prospect of expanding the MAB family. Appreciation was extended to the Secretariat team, interpreters and the Itaipu team for their outstanding support. The Secretary also commended the Paraguayan authorities for their swift agreement and exceptional cooperation during the event's organization. A warm welcome was extended to new Council members, particularly those joining the Bureau, and congratulations were offered to all new, reviewed, extended and renamed biosphere reserves. The Secretary invited M. Cantos to join the MAB family's think tank to provide guidance and support the Programme, and concluded by thanking the Chair.

414. In his concluding statement, Mr Ma Keping, Chair of the International Coordinating Council of the MAB Programme, thanked the Secretariat and Member States for their contributions to the meeting's success, noting the valuable lessons learned from the experiences of other Bureau members, and wished everyone a pleasant and safe journey home.

ANNEX 1

List of participants

By alphabetical order / par ordre alphabétique

MEMBER STATES / ETATS MEMBRES

Austria / Autriche
Martin Fritz
Michael Jungmeier

Azerbaijan / Azerbaïdjan
Rashad Allahverdiyev
Nahid Omarov

Bangladesh
Md Walid Bin Quashem
Shahanara Yasmin Lily

Brazil / Brésil
Camila Domit
Bernardo Issa de Souza
Leandro Sousa

Canada
Zoe Compton
Jean-Philippe Messier

China / Chine
Qiang Fang
Keping Ma
Ding Wang
Yijie Xian
H.E. Ms. Xinyu Yang
Yan Zhuang

Colombia / Colombie
Fanny Sierra

Cook Islands / Îles Cook
Linda Ruamoana

Costa Rica
Meryll Arias Quirós

Denmark / Danemark
Mads Randbøll Wolff

France
Didier Babin

Guinea / Guinée
Mamadou Bhoye Bah

Honduras
Daniel Ricardo Garcia Aguilar

Italy / Italie
Giulio Del Federico

Jamaica / Jamaïque
Joy Douglas

Japan / Japon
Takaaki Iwasa
Tsunao Watanabe

Lithuania / Lituanie
Agnė Jasinavičiūtė-Trakimienė

Mali
Aoua Chérif Doumbia
Souleymane Konate

Morocco / Maroc
Lhou Ed-Dahby
Khadija Sansar
Latifa Yaakoubi

Oman
Saud Al-Bulushi
Salim Alrubaii

Panama
Ana Lorena López

Portugal
Cristina Abreu
Helena Freitas

Republic of Korea / République de Corée
So Yoon Chang
Do-Soon Cho
Suk-Kyung Shim
Ouiseok So

Spain / Espagne
Rosa Maria Araujo Cabello
Susana Bertomeu Ceferino
Francisco Jose Cantos Mengs
Alberto Hernandez-Salinas
Antonio Miguel Sánchez

Sudan / Soudan
Abdelrahman Yahia Abelrahman Elmahdi

Togo
Awuve Koffi Afetogbo Azilan
Wolali Nyamador

United Republic of Tanzania / République-Unie de Tanzanie
Albert Mziray
Glory William Summay
Rose Sallema Mtui
Noel Yocta

Zambia / Zambie
Cyprian Katongo

OBSERVERS / OBSERVATEURS

Angola
Fernando Manuel Camutenha

Aruba
Nadji Bilík

Monaco
Agatha Korczak

Paraguay
Jose Acosta
Nestor Fabian Almando Dure
Ramón Esteban Chilavert Torres
Alejandra Lucía Corvalán Maldonado
Adriana Decoud
Jorge Raúl Díaz Acosta
Rodrigo Espínola Benítez
Soledad Espinola Torres
Tatiana Galluppi
Rosario Gamarra
Fosco Emmanuel Gugliotta Ruggeri
Sergio Legal
Juan Dario Mandelburger Gonzalez
Nelson Enrique Molas González
Carlos Monges Oggero
Linda Rios
H.E. Ms Nancy Ovelar de Gorostiaga
Matilde Beatriz Oviedo Báez
Rene Ariel Sanchez
Victor Manuel Trigo Baez
Pedro Villalba
Cinthya Viviana Villalba Forcadell

Philippines
Algene Edward M. Francisco
Jasper Francisco
Ivan Anthony Henares
Walter Marquez

Sweden / Suède
Johanna MacTaggart

Timor-Leste
Luis Nivio de Fatima Soares
Hortencia Felicidade dos Santos Ferreira

Pedro Pinto
Fernandino Vieira da Costa

Viet Nam
Ngok Kien Dang
Nguyen Thang Dao
Thi Ngoc Loan Le
Van Bao Le
Chi Toan Nguyen
Nam Khanh Nguyen
Thi Huong Giang Nguyen
Viet Thang Nguyen
Thi Phuong Chi Pham
Van Phuoc Phan
Van Hoai Tran
Thanh Khai Truong
Van Dinh Vo

GUESTS / INVITÉS

President of the Republic of Paraguay / Président de la République du Paraguay
H.E. Mr Santiago Peña Palacios

President of the 43rd session of the General Conference of UNESCO / Président de la 43e session de la Conférence générale de l'UNESCO
H.E. Mr Khondker Mohammad Talha

Director-General of ITAIPU Paraguay / Directeur général ITAIPU Paraguay
Justo Aricio Zacarías Irún

Brazilian Youth Network of Biosphere Reserves
Ana Clara Bernardes Silva

Federación por la Autodeterminación de los Pueblos Indígenas (FAPI)
Mirta Pereira
Alberto Vázquez

Fundación Moisés Bertoni
Silvani Gimenez
Alicia Rivarola
Laura Rodríguez

Global Youth Biodiversity Network
Jeremias David Medina Martínez

ITAIPU Binacional
Edgar Erasmo Baez Chamorro
Walter Groehn

Itaipu Biosphere Reserve
Yamil Yaluff

Mui Ca Mau Biosphere Reserve
Ly Minh Kha

People's Committee of Quang Tri Province
Truong Hai Tran

Red IberoMaB
Danilo Salas

Rede Brasileira de Reservas da Biosfera
Mary Sorage Medeiros

Semad – Secretaria de Estado de Meio Ambiente e Desenvolvimento Sustentável de Goiás

Andréa Vulcanis

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) / Programme des Nations Unies pour le développement (PNUD)
Norma Beatríz Ramos Rodas

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Deputy Director-General / Directrice générale adjointe
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Claudia Gouet
Claudia Hareau
Isabelle Seguela
Hedwig Spitzer
Diana Tomioka Saito

ANNEX 2

SC-26/CONF.238/11rev
Paris, 29 May 2026
Original: English

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

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

Thirty-eighth session

ITAIPU Biosphere Reserve, Paraguay

3 – 6 June 2026

ADOPTED AGENDA

1. Opening Remarks by Chair of the MAB International Coordinating Council (MAB-ICC)
2. Opening Remarks of the Director-General of UNESCO or his representative
3. Report of Ms. Latifa Yaakoubi, Chair of the MAB-ICC
4. Election of the new Bureau Members of the MAB-ICC
5. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable
6. Report of the Secretary of the MAB Programme
7. Update on MAB's contribution to the Kunming – Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)
8. Update on the digitalization of the MAB programme's statutory processes and documents and the Biosphere Reserves and Global Geoparks Resource Hub
9. Update on the preparation of a monitoring and evaluation framework for the MAB Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (2026-2035)
10. The role of Youth in the MAB programme, including the 3rd Global Youth Forum
11. MAB Young Scientists Award and MAB-YSA Prince Albert I of Monaco Awards
12. Reports on actions undertaken by Member States / Regional and Thematic MAB Networks in the context of MAB with a focus on MAB Strategic Framework
13. Update on the Process of Excellence
14. Periodic Review reports and follow-up information received since the 37th session of the MAB-ICC
15. Proposals for New Biosphere Reserves and Extensions/ Modifications/ Renaming of Biosphere

Reserves that are part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves

16. Other matters

17. Date and location of the 39th session of the MAB-ICC

18. Adoption of the report of the 38th Session of the MAB-ICC

19. Closure of the Session

ANNEX 3

SC-26/CONF.238/11rev
Paris, 29 May 2026
Original: English

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

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

Thirty-eighth session

ITAIPU Biosphere Reserve, Paraguay

3 – 6 June 2026

ITEM XIV OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA: Periodic Review Reports and Follow-Up Information Received since the 37th session of the MAB-ICC

1. Document SC-26/CONF.238/11 contains the recommendations regarding the periodic reviews of individual biosphere reserves examined by the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves (IACBR) at its 32nd meeting, held in February 2026. Where relevant, it also refers to previous decisions of the MAB International Coordinating Council (MAB-ICC).
2. At its 32nd meeting, held from 9 to 13 February 2026, the Advisory Committee reviewed thirty-four (34) periodic review reports from eighteen (18) countries, as well as twenty-six (26) follow-up submissions related to previous recommendations, from nine (9) countries.
3. The Advisory Committee's recommendations for each of these sites are included in Annexes 1 and 2 of this document. These recommendations have been transmitted to the respective Member States for their information and any necessary follow-up. Any additional information submitted by 15 May 2026 will be reviewed by the MAB Council and its Bureau.
4. The Advisory Committee clearly indicated the deadline for submitting additional information in its recommendations. Accordingly, the MAB Secretariat informed the concerned countries.
5. The Secretariat briefed the Advisory Committee on the implementation of the Process of Excellence and notified the relevant national authorities regarding the sites that were delayed in submitting their periodic reviews or follow-up information. Further details about the Process of Excellence are provided in document SC-26/CONF.238/10.
6. The Advisory Committee took note of an official communication from the Government of Israel informing the MAB Secretariat of its decision to voluntarily withdraw the Mount Carmel Biosphere Reserve from the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.
7. The Advisory Committee then highlighted several structural challenges related to the periodic review process. A significant increase in submissions is anticipated in the coming years, far exceeding one hundred reports annually in 2026 and 2027. While approximately two-thirds of biosphere reserves submit their periodic review reports within expected or

extended deadlines, and around three-quarters of these meet the required criteria, a substantial number of sites continue to face difficulties in meeting reporting requirements, affecting data quality, consistency and the capacity of the network to provide targeted support.

8. The Advisory Committee noted that the current reporting process represents a significant administrative and financial burden for biosphere reserve management authorities. In addition, it highlighted the increasing challenges faced by the MAB Secretariat and the IACBR itself in maintaining the highest reviewing standards in light of the rapidly increasing volume of reports.

9. The Advisory Committee emphasized the need to revisit the periodic review framework. It noted that the current periodic review form, last revised in 2013, is often perceived as overly complex, lengthy and insufficiently aligned with the objectives of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (2026 – 2035). The Committee stressed the importance of simplifying and streamlining the structure and content of the form, reducing redundancies, and focusing on core information to strengthen monitoring and evaluation.

10. The Advisory Committee expressed its willingness to contribute to the development of a revised, more concise and user-friendly reporting format, while maintaining the level of detail required for effective evaluation.

11. The Secretariat views this request favourably from an operational perspective, in the context of developing a Monitoring and Evaluation system for the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan, as well as for its potential to strengthen linkages with international targets related to conservation and sustainable development.

12. In light hereof, the MAB Council is invited to:

a) consider and approve the recommendations made by the Advisory Committee at its 32nd meeting, including any modifications to be proposed by the MAB Bureau during the Council session;

b) take note of the withdrawal of the Mount Carmel Biosphere Reserve (Israel) from the World Network of Biosphere Reserves;

c) request the MAB Secretariat, in consultation with the Advisory Committee, to propose a revision of the Periodic Review form and process to the 39th session of the MAB-ICC, with a view to simplifying reporting requirements and strengthening alignment with Programme priorities, international frameworks, and the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (2026-2035);

d) invite the MAB Secretariat to review the composition and size of the IACBR, in order to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and able to effectively address the growing workload.

ANNEX 1: PERIODIC REVIEW REPORTS EXAMINED BY THE 32nd meeting of the IACBR

Country	Biosphere Reserve	Comment
Albania	Ohrid-Prespa	Does not meet
Algeria	Belezma	Additional information requested
Argentina	Patagonia Azul	Does not meet
Austria	Wienerwald	Meets the criteria
China	Bogda	Meets the criteria
China	Dalai Lake	Meets the criteria
China	Jinggangshan	Meets the criteria
China	Shankou Mangrove	Meets the criteria
China	Snake Island – Laotie Mountain	Additional information requested
China	Wudalianchi	Additional information requested
China	Fujian Wuyishan	Meets the criteria
China	Yading	Meets the criteria
China	Yancheng	Meets the criteria
Estonia	West Estonian Archipielago	Meets the criteria
Ethiopia	Sheka	Additional information requested
Ethiopia	Kafa	Additional information requested
Finland	Archipielago Sea Area	Meets the criteria
France	Gorge du Gardon	Meets the criteria
Italy	Ledro Alps	Meets the criteria
Italy	Po Delta	Meets the criteria
Italy	Tuscan Islands	Additional information requested
Italy	Collemeluccio-Montedimezzo Alto Molise	Additional information requested
Jordan	Dana	Meets the criteria
Jordan	Mujib	Additional information requested
Myanmar	Inlay Lake	Meets the criteria
Polonia	Babia Gora	Meets the criteria
South Africa	Gouritz Cluster	Additional information requested
South Africa	Magaliesberg	Additional information requested
Spain	Alto Bernesga	Meets the criteria
Spain	Gran Canaria	Meets the criteria
Sweden	Kristianstad Vattenrike	Meets the criteria
Uganda	Queen Elisabeth	Additional information requested
Viet Nam	Langbiang	Meets the criteria
Viet Nam	Red River Delta	Does not meet

Recommendations by the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves:

ITEM 9: EXAMINATION OF PERIODIC REVIEW REPORTS RECEIVED SINCE THE LAST ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING AND STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF PERIODIC REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS ENDORSED BY THE MAB-ICC AND THE PROCESS OF EXCELLENCE

Periodic review reports received since the last Advisory Committee meeting

232. **Ohrid-Prespa Biosphere Reserve (Albania).** The Advisory Committee reviewed the first periodic review report for the Albanian section of the Ohrid-Prespa Transboundary Biosphere Reserve (TBR), designated in 2014. Situated on the Balkan Peninsula, the reserve spans the border between Albania and North Macedonia. Its landscape blends vast aquatic ecosystems with surrounding mountain ranges, while lower-lying plains form the outer boundaries shared by both countries. The Ohrid-Prespa TBR hosts an exceptional variety of ecological systems – from high-altitude mountain zones to temperate and subtropical forests that thrive at lower elevations. Lakes Ohrid and Prespa together constitute one of Europe's largest interconnected lake systems of this type, recognized for their distinctive geological features and remarkable biological diversity.

233. The Advisory Committee noted that the zonation consists of all required types of zones and complies with the Statutory Framework. However, the submitted dossier states that 'within the buffer zone, the territorial zoning has been revised. The previous zoning categories applied to protected areas have been withdrawn and redefined in alignment with the provisions of the approved PA management plans'. Unfortunately, the authorities provided insufficient information on area and spatial configuration, the rationale for these changes or clear maps that show where the changes have occurred and their significance for compliance with the Statutory Framework.

234. The Advisory Committee noted that the provided information was rather general in nature. The dossier lacks data on the biosphere reserve budget or the number of biosphere reserve staff. While the document refers to multiple activities implemented in the biosphere reserve, the Committee noted the absence of information or evidence on specific biosphere reserve projects that address all three functions or extend outside the protected areas.

235. Based on the submitted information, the Advisory Committee observed that most reported activities focus on the conservation function with some attention given to logistical support. However, activities related to sustainable development were only weakly described. Although the document refers to the Management and Cooperation Plan for the Ohrid-Prespa Transboundary Biosphere Reserve – which is expected to outline concrete measures and guidelines for biodiversity conservation, sustainable development and community involvement – it was not included in the dossier. Similarly, while management plans for protected areas were cited, the national Biosphere Reserve Management Plan was also absent.

236. The biosphere reserve governance structure is based on that of the Protected Areas Administration, with relatively limited financial and human resources and no direct participation of other stakeholders in biosphere reserve management, resulting in weak coordination. The authorities reported that working groups and consultative forums have been established to bring together local residents and representatives of women's groups, farmers, fishers and cultural organizations, to ensure that decisions reflect local needs and priorities; however, no specific information or supporting evidence was provided.

237. Identified challenges include insufficient financial resources, the absence of a management plan covering the entire biosphere reserve and limited institutional

capacity, which have led to inadequate coordination among the various stakeholder groups. Addressing these issues will require stronger institutional collaboration, the establishment of stable long-term funding mechanisms, and continued efforts to build local capacities through training and technical assistance.

238. The site emphasizes cooperation with various protected areas but has limited collaboration with other biosphere reserves, notably its North Macedonian transboundary counterpart.

239. The Advisory Committee expressed concern that the periodic review dossier included only the Albanian national review, while the transboundary biosphere reserve and North Macedonia reviews were not submitted. The Advisory Committee also noted that the provided maps included parts of the biosphere reserve area located in Greece, which are not officially designated as part of the transboundary biosphere reserve.

240. Based on the provided information, the Advisory Committee concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Advisory Committee requested that the Albanian authorities undertake the following actions and report back to the MAB Secretariat by **30 September 2027**:

a. Ensure adequate core funding for biosphere reserve coordination, including support for a dedicated biosphere reserve management and implementation unit, in order to enhance the reserve's overall performance and impact.

b. Submit a comprehensive biosphere reserve management plan, in line with the Statutory Framework, the Technical Guidelines for Biosphere Reserves and the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan, to ensure balanced implementation of all three biosphere reserve functions.

c. Establish a dedicated governance body for the biosphere reserve with appropriate institutional and executive capacities, composed of diverse stakeholder and interest groups, to ensure that all biosphere reserve functions are equally represented and supported.

d. Strengthen cooperation with the North Macedonian section of the Ohrid-Prespa Transboundary Biosphere Reserve, ensuring a balanced implementation of the three functions, operationalizing a cross-border coordination body and actively participating in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, with particular attention to the Pamplona recommendations.

e. Provide accurate and up-to-date biosphere reserve maps.

f. Submit the international transboundary biosphere reserve periodic review dossier, as a result of joint efforts by both national biosphere reserve teams.

241. The Advisory Committee further recommended the authorities to consult the Technical Guidelines for Biosphere Reserves, seek support from established biosphere reserves in Albania and the wider Balkan region, draw on experience gained within the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and request technical assistance from the MAB Secretariat to ensure that all actions align with the criteria of the MAB Programme.

242. **Belezma Biosphere Reserve (Algeria).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the first periodic review report of the Belezma Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2015. The Belezma Biosphere Reserve is located in north-eastern Algeria, within Batna Province, on the slopes of the Belezma Range in the Aurès Mountains. It encompasses 5,315 ha of Atlas cedar forest, accounting for almost one-third of Algeria's total cedar forest area.

243. Upon designation of the site in 2015, the MAB ICC recommended extending the buffer zone and/or transition area outside the boundaries of the national park. This

recommendation was subsequently implemented. The inclusion of 15 municipalities increased the total area of the biosphere reserve from 26,250 ha to 65,670 ha, and allowed for the integration of a wider diversity of habitats, improved connectivity with surrounding natural areas and a reduction in human pressures on ecosystems, strengthening the overall resilience of the site. The inclusion of additional communities potentially creates greater opportunities for ecotourism development and income generation. However, the dossier does not sufficiently explain the changes in zonation and surface areas, or clearly assess their implications for the three functions of the biosphere reserve (conservation, development and logistical support).

244. The Belezma Biosphere Reserve plays a fundamental role in biodiversity conservation, the provision of ecosystem services and knowledge generation. Over the past ten years, several significant changes have occurred within the biosphere reserve, affecting the local economy, landscape and land use. These changes include infrastructure development (particularly road and energy projects) as well as mining activities, all of which have had implications for the territory's ecological and socio-economic dynamics.

245. The governance structure established for the biosphere reserve, including a steering (or management) council and a scientific council, facilitates inclusive and participatory site management. All key stakeholders were involved in the periodic review process, including local authorities, civil society organizations, community representatives and the biosphere reserve management team.

246. The Advisory Committee was **unable to determine** whether this biosphere reserve meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. Therefore, the Advisory Committee requested that the national authorities submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**:

a. A comprehensive explanation of the revised zonation and the extension, including clarification as to whether the proposed extension of the core area has formal legal protection status; an assessment of the impacts of the zonation changes on the three functions of the biosphere reserve (conservation, development and logistic support); and a revised version of the table under section i of the summary offering a clear comparison between the areas indicated in the original nomination file and the proposed changes.

b. A land use map that matches the boundaries of the extended biosphere reserve.

c. Copies of the successive management plans referred to in the dossier and a clear explanation of their coverage, specifically whether they refer to the biosphere reserve as a whole (i.e. all three zones) or only to the legally protected areas. If such management plans do not exist, provide a workplan for the participatory preparation and adoption of a management plan.

d. Detailed information about the road crossing part of the biosphere reserve (including the core area and buffer zone), its impact on the fragmented natural habitats and any mitigation measures undertaken to address these effects.

e. Detailed information regarding the impacts on natural resources habitats, biodiversity and the quality of life of local populations of quarrying activities and energy production at the solar energy station in Oued El Ma, as well as any adopted mitigation measures, if relevant.

f. Detailed information regarding the impacts of extensive tourism activities, taking into account the tenfold increase in tourist numbers over the last decade.

247. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee encouraged the authorities to develop information and awareness among stakeholders to reduce pressure on resources, including the development of a strategy to better involve youth in biosphere reserve activities, and the launch of a website for the Belezma Biosphere Reserve.

248. **Patagonia Azul Biosphere Reserve (Argentina).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the first periodic review of the Patagonia Azul Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2015, and acknowledged the significant progress achieved in expanding core areas and strengthening marine conservation, including the creation and enlargement of several protected areas. Howev er, it noted that although the total surface area remains broadly stable, the substantial internal re-zoning – resulting in a 145 per cent increase in core areas – has not been sufficiently justified. The report does not clearly demonstrate how the revised zonation ensures ecological connectivity and functi onal integration among core, buffer and transition areas, or how the three MAB functions are implemented in a balanced and integrated manner.

249. The Committee further observed that, while a Management Committee was formally established in July 2025, an integrated Strategic Management Plan covering the entire biosphere reserve is still lacking. Clarification is also required regarding the budget framework, biodiversity monitoring systems, ecosystem service indicators and the structured participation of stakeholders across all zones.

250. In view of these gaps, the Advisory Committee concluded that the Patagonia Azul Biosphere Reserve **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requested that the national authorities submit to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**:

a. A detailed justification of the revised zonation, including the criteria and methodology used to redefine boundaries, and a clear explanation as to how ecological connectivity and functional integration between the core, buffer and transition areas are ensured.

b. The development and formal approval of a Strategic Management Plan for the biosphere reserve, encompassing core areas, buffer zones and transition areas. This plan should include a comprehensive timetable and incorporate a system of measurable indicators for conservation, sustainable development and effective governance, taking into consideration the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan.

c. An explanation of how the sustainability strategy created by the Subsecretariat of Conservation and Protected Areas will support the integrated management of the entire biosphere reserve, particularly with regard to fostering sustainable development in non-core areas, and ensuring coherence and alignment across all zones to effectively fulfil the conservation and development functions of the site.

d. Clarification of the budget framework, specifying the period covered, the allocation of resources across biosphere reserves zones and the corresponding functions, and initiatives that remain unimplemented due to financial constraints, together with measures envisaged to ensure long-term financial sustainability.

e. Updated information on biodiversity monitoring, including recent assessments and the development of indicators for ecosystem services, as well as measures taken in response to wildlife health risks, such as the 2022 avian influenza outbreak.

f. Clarification on the population size of the biosphere reserve, both overall and by zone, as differing figures are reported.

g. Structured description of stakeholders at national, provincial and local levels, indicating their roles in governance and management.

251. **Wienerwald Biosphere Reserve (Austria).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the second periodic review report of the Wienerwald Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2005. The site encompasses a landscape located between the Northern Alps and the Pannonian Basin, just west of Vienna. The city is partly included within the biosphere reserve, making the site a good example of combined urban and natural environments. The area is a typical Central European cultural landscape with major ecosystems including forest (mixed oak, beech, black pine and mixed maple-lime), meadows,

pasture, arable land, viticultural landscapes and water bodies. The population amounts to 240,000 inhabitants whose livelihoods are linked mainly to services, industry, agriculture, forestry and renewable energy.

252. The Advisory Committee noted some changes in previously published information, due to the use of highly accurate GIS data. This information was reflected appropriately in the zonation. It also noted the expansion of buffer zones from 19 per cent to 31 per cent of the total biosphere reserve with a corresponding decrease in transition area. This change reflects the designation of the Vienna buffer zone as a landscape protection area. Following these changes, the total area of the biosphere reserve amounts to 105,645 ha, with core areas of 5,442 ha, a buffer zone of 32,571 ha and a transition area of 67,632 ha. The zonation complies with the Statutory Framework.

253. The three biosphere reserve functions were carried out in a well-balanced manner, with adequate funding, staffing and implementation in line with the Management Plan. This involved cooperation with a wide range of partners ranging from local communities to businesses, academia and other sectors. Concrete examples include projects such as the Reintroduction of the Ural Owl, and the long-term Restoration of Dry Grassland Habitats 2024–2034, which focuses on endangered dry grassland ecosystems. Public activities also made a significant contribution. Examples include Biodiversity Day, which emphasizes citizen science and local engagement and is supported by municipalities, local stakeholders and partner organizations; and Der Wein, an annual wine award that promotes sustainable viticulture. Although the biosphere reserve does not operate its own programme for supporting economic initiatives, it participates actively in numerous programmes run by the states of Vienna and Lower Austria, as well as national-level initiatives. Through such involvement, the biosphere reserve helps raise awareness of sustainable development. Research and monitoring are also well developed and involve cooperation with numerous partners.

254. The governance structure encourages stakeholders to participate in site management through the Regional Forum, a Scientific Advisory Board, the Supervisory Board and the General Assembly. Regular thematic gatherings, for example networking sessions or meetings of core area landowners, further support their inclusion. The biosphere reserve also implements the concept of biosphere reserve ambassadors to foster public engagement. Coordination is provided by a limited company, Biosphärenpark Wienerwald Management GmbH.

255. The Wienerwald Biosphere Reserve plays an active role in the WNBR, consistently engaging in cooperation with partners and other sites at both the national and international levels.

256. The Advisory Committee concluded that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Committee encouraged the authorities to maintain and develop cooperation efforts, especially at the international level.

257. **Bogda Biosphere Reserve (China).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the second periodic review report of the Bogda Biosphere Reserve, commending the authorities on progress made since designation of the site in 1990 and the initial periodic review in 2014.

258. The Bogda Biosphere Reserve is situated in Fukang City, Changji Prefecture, Xinjiang, and has a total area of 217,000 ha, including a core area of 48,069 ha, a buffer zone of 128,931 ha and a transition area of 40,000 ha. The site is the only biosphere reserve located in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and constitutes a ‘wet island’ situated in the otherwise extremely arid Asian interior.

259. The Advisory Committee noted that management of the Bogda Biosphere Reserve is undertaken by the Management Bureau of Xinjiang Tianchi Bogda Peak Nature Reserve

based on the Overall Plan for Xinjiang Tianchi Bogda Peak Nature Reserve (2018–2027). A brief English version of the 2024–2033 Management Plan was submitted with the periodic review report.

260. The Bogda Biosphere Reserve has improved its management system by establishing rules and guidelines, including measures for resource protection and methods for field-patrol monitoring. To enhance forest fire prevention, the reserve developed and published 'Forest Fire Management Specifications', which have since been adopted as a local standard in Xinjiang.

261. The Advisory Committee appreciated the outcomes of implemented recommendations from the previous review and the well-conducted periodic review process, which involved data collection and investigation processes, pre-evaluation, on-site evaluation, and evaluation meetings with the participation of stakeholders including administration representatives, local entrepreneurs, residents, tourists and research groups.

262. The Advisory Committee commended the authorities on the accomplishments achieved across all three biosphere reserve functions since the first periodic review in 2014. Notable examples include increased forest ecosystem services and forest coverage in the core areas and buffer zones, successful fire prevention and control, the identification of new species through collaboration with universities and research institutes, and various projects supporting residents' livelihoods.

263. The Advisory Committee concluded that the Bogda Biosphere Reserve **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and recommended that the biosphere reserve authority make efforts to collaborate/cooperate with other UNESCO biosphere reserves at national, regional and international levels to share their experiences and benefit from training opportunities. The Advisory Committee requested that the relevant authority submit the shapefiles for the biosphere reserve to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**.

264. **Dalai Lake Biosphere Reserve (China).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the second periodic review report of the Dalai Lake Biosphere Reserve, and commended the authorities on the progress made since designation of the site in 2002 and the first periodic review in 2013.

265. The Dalai Lake Biosphere Reserve is located in the northeast part of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, west of Hulunbuir City. The reserve includes the New Balhu Left Banner, the New Balhu Right Banner and the Manzhouli administrative area. The site is a comprehensive protected area focused on the conservation of rare bird species and the lake wetlands and grassland ecosystems on which they depend. It is managed by the Inner Mongolia Hulun Lake National Nature Reserve Administration, whose work is guided by the Dalai Lake (Hulun Lake) Biosphere Reserve Management Plan for 2023–2032.

266. The Advisory Committee appreciated the submission of a brief English version of the 2023–2032 Management Plan, which outlines the goals and guidelines for construction, development, conservation management, research and monitoring, publicity and education, and international cooperation over the next decade.

267. The Advisory Committee noted that the total area of the biosphere reserve remains largely the same with a slight change in zonation since the first periodic review (an increase of 851 ha in the core areas, an increase of 280 ha in the buffer zones and a decrease of 1131 ha in the transition area). The human population has decreased from 1,771 in 2013 to 1,500 in 2022. There is no permanent population in either the core areas or buffer zones.

268. The Committee praised the progress achieved across all three functions of the biosphere reserve since the initial periodic review in 2013, highlighting the enhancement

of ecosystem services in grassland and wetland habitats within core and buffer zones, the discovery of additional species through partnerships with universities and research institutions, and the implementation of multiple initiatives aimed at improving local livelihoods.

269. The Advisory Committee concluded that the Dalai Lake Biosphere Reserve **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Committee recommended that the management authorities collaborate more closely with other biosphere reserves within the World Network of Biosphere Reserves to share their experiences and create synergies in management, governance, public awareness and visibility. The Advisory Committee requested the relevant authority to submit the shapefiles and videos for the biosphere reserve to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**.

270. **Jinggangshan Biosphere Reserve (China).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the first periodic review report of the Jinggangshan Biosphere Reserve, and commended the progress made since designation of the site in 2012. The Jinggangshan Biosphere Reserve is situated in Jinggangshan City, Ji'an City, Jiangxi Province. The reserve is a comprehensive protected area focused on conserving the forest ecosystems and biodiversity of middle subtropical moist evergreen broadleaf forests.

271. The Advisory Committee appreciated the information provided on the national evaluation process for the biosphere reserve, including pre-evaluation, on-site evaluation and evaluation meetings, which involved various stakeholders and a field evaluation by MAB-China.

272. The Advisory Committee noted that the Jiangxi Jinggangshan National Nature Reserve Administration Bureau is responsible for management of the site, guided by the Jinggangshan Biosphere Reserve Management Plan (2024–2033). The Advisory Committee appreciated the submission of a brief English version of the Management Plan, which covers all three functions of the biosphere reserve and the goals for international cooperation over the next decade.

273. The Advisory Committee also noted that the total area (29,053 ha) and zoning of the biosphere reserve have not changed since designation of the site in 2012. There is no permanent population in either the core area or buffer zone, while the population of the transition area amounted to 5,436 households and 17,000 people as of the end of 2023. This population resides in 13 administrative villages and 34 natural villages in Ciping and Luofu Town. A further 4,400 people love outside of the reserve in an area comprising 5 administrative villages and 11 natural villages.

274. The Advisory Committee concluded that the Jinggangshan Biosphere Reserve **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Committee recommended that the reserve make effective use of the UNESCO platform to strengthen exchanges and cooperation with other biosphere reserves worldwide, and deepen cooperation with research institutes to enhance the monitoring of background resources and objects under protection. The Advisory Committee requested that the relevant authority submit the shapefiles for the biosphere reserve to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**.

275. **Shankou Mangrove Biosphere Reserve (China).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the second periodic review report of the Shankou Mangrove Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2000, which follows the first periodic review report submitted in 2010. The report is based on an on-site evaluation in April 2024, organized by the MAB National Committee of China.

276. The Shankou Mangrove Biosphere Reserve, located in southern China, comprises the east and west terrestrial and coastal waters of the Shatian Peninsula in the southeast of Hepu County, Guangxi Autonomous Region. The site contains the oldest

and largest contiguous mangrove ecosystem in China.

277. The Advisory Committee noted the slight increase in the terrestrial buffer zones (from 511 ha to 512 ha) and terrestrial transition area (from 2,518 ha to 2,521 ha) compared to the previous periodic report, based on a boundary demarcation report approved by the Guangxi Autonomous Region in July 2020. Accordingly, the total area of the Shankou Mangrove Biosphere Reserve now covers 8,003 ha, consisting of marine core areas of 824 ha, buffer zones of 3,601 ha (terrestrial 512 ha, marine 3,089 ha) and transition areas of 3,578 ha (terrestrial 2,521 ha, marine 1,057 ha)

278. The Advisory Committee commended the authorities on accomplishments achieved across all three biosphere reserve functions since the first periodic report in 2010. As a result of measures undertaken for mangrove conservation and restoration, and alien species control, the mangrove forest area of the Shankou Mangrove Biosphere Reserve has increased from 819 ha in 2010 to 920 ha in 2023, an increase of 12.3 per cent. Listed bird species have more than doubled in numbers from 118 in 2008 to 245 in 2023, and the number of recorded benthic species rose by 55 per cent from 251 in 2010 to 390 in 2023.

279. Concerning the local economy, the Shankou Mangrove Biosphere Reserve has taken multiple measures to alleviate poverty in collaboration with local governments and committees. As a result of these actions, the per capita income of communities around the biosphere reserve has almost tripled from RMB 5,654 in 2010 to RMB 14,194 in 2024. Their income derives mainly from fisheries, aquaculture and the service sector.

280. The Advisory Committee noted the development of a ten-year management plan for the Shankou Mangrove Biosphere Reserve (2024–2033). The reserve has also developed and implemented a co-management network and established community co-management committees to engage institutions related to mangrove conservation in close cooperation with the local government.

281. The Advisory Committee concluded that the Shankou Mangrove Biosphere Reserve **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and recommended that the authorities continue their efforts to address persistent challenges, including insufficient staffing, weak research capabilities, and the need for eco-tourism branding and promotion.

282. The Advisory Committee also encouraged the biosphere reserve to establish a joint conservation mechanism to share their experiences in developing mangrove ecosystems with other relevant sites in China and ASEAN countries. Additionally, the Committee requested that the relevant authority submit the zonation map with readable coordinates and proper MAB terminologies and shapefiles for the biosphere reserve to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**.

283. **Snake Island – Laotie Mountain Biosphere Reserve (China).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the first periodic review report of the Snake Island – Laotie Mountain Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2013. This report is based on an on-site evaluation in October 2024, organized by the MAB National Committee of China.

284. The zonation of the Snake Island – Laotie Mountain Biosphere Reserve has remained the same since designation, with a total area of 9,072 ha, consisting of core areas of 3,565 ha, buffer zones of 1,947 ha and transition areas of 3,560 ha. Due to its irreplaceable conservation significance for various raptor species along the East Asia-Australasia Flyway and its role as a breeding ground for endangered species, the Snake Island – Laotie Mountain migratory bird habitat was included as one of five added components of the extended Migratory Bird Sanctuaries along the Coast of Yellow Sea-Bohai Gulf of China (Phase II) at the 46th Session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in 2024.

285. The Advisory Committee noted the establishment of an expert advisory committee, which has entered into co-management agreements with 19 village committees to strengthen land management, clarify ownership responsibilities and improve the land co-management accountability system. The biosphere reserve has also actively developed business initiatives aligned with the local economy, resulting in the doubling of the annual per capita disposable income of urban residents, from RMB 27,637 in 2013 to RMB 52,522 in 2023.

286. The Advisory Committee acknowledged the submission of the Management Plan for the Snake Island – Laotie Mountain Biosphere Reserve (2024–2034), but noted that the content of the submitted management plan concerns the Snake Island-Laotie Mountain Nature Reserve, not the biosphere reserve.

287. In conclusion, the Advisory Committee was **unable to determine** whether this biosphere reserve meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Advisory Committee requested the concerned authority to submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**:

a. A valid management plan for the biosphere reserve (or a detailed English summary hereof).

b. A zonation map and vegetation map with readable coordinates and information including proper legends in English, French or Spanish.

c. Shapefiles for the site.

288. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee recommended that the concerned authority use the biosphere reserve's location as a key migratory hub along the East Asia – Australasia Flyway to strengthen financial and technical support for raptor research and protection, and create a coordination mechanism or network for monitoring migratory birds in the Dalian area.

289. The Advisory Committee also encouraged the authorities to harmonize the management of the biosphere reserve and the World Heritage site, with a view to creating synergies and adding value.

290. **Wudalianchi Biosphere Reserve (China).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the second periodic review report of the Wudalianchi Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2003, which follows the first periodic review report in 2014. The report is based on an on-site evaluation in August 2024, organized by the MAB National Committee of China.

291. The Wudalianchi Biosphere Reserve is located administratively in Heihe City, Heilongjiang Province, in northeastern China. It contains the world's most complete, densely distributed and diverse collection of young and old volcanic landforms, which were designated as the Wudalianchi UNESCO Global Geopark in 2015. It forms part of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway and serves as a critical migration route for globally endangered species such as the black-billed capercaillie and the Siberian crane.

292. Over the past decade, the total area (106,000 ha) has remained unchanged, while the population decreased by four-fifths, from 56,102 in 2013 to 14,005 in 2022. The forest area increased from 30,303 ha in 2013 to 35,836 ha over the same period, with forest coverage rising from 28.6 per cent in 2013 to 29.9 per cent in 2022, and timber stock volume increasing significantly due to forest recovery and afforestation projects. No forest fires occurred during 46 consecutive fire prevention periods, thanks to stringent forest fire prevention measures and efficient emergency response capabilities.

293. The income of both urban and rural residents has grown significantly, driven by the development of high-quality mineral spring products, the health and wellness industry, and enhanced eco-tourism. At the 28th International Coordinating Council of the MAB

held in March 2016 in Lima, the director of the Wudalianchi Scenic Area Management Committee was awarded the Michel Batisse Biosphere Reserve Management Award.

294. The Advisory Committee noted several of the challenges the biosphere reserve faces, including insufficient funds for conservation and restoration, limited staff, weak scientific research capacity, a need for enhanced international cooperation and a lack of progress in driving community development for alternative livelihoods.

295. In conclusion, the Advisory Committee was **unable to determine** whether this biosphere reserve meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and asked the concerned authority to submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**:

a. An explanation as to how the Wudalianchi Scenic Area Nature Reserve Management Committee can act as a responsible governance body for the Wudalianchi Biosphere Reserve, including the reason why the committee carries this name.

b. A detailed explanation for the significant population decrease over the past decade.

296. The Advisory Committee also requested the authorities to submit the following information missing from the periodic review form to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026:**

a. An updated list of land use and management/cooperation plans.

b. Shapefiles for the site.

c. Signed agreements granting non-exclusive rights to UNESCO for the use of photos and videos from the site.

297. **Wuyishan Biosphere Reserve (China).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the third periodic review report of the Wuyishan Biosphere Reserve, designated in 1987. The previous periodic review reports were submitted in 1997 and 2017.

298. The Wuyishan Biosphere Reserve is located in the northwestern part of Fujian Province and the north of the Wuyishan mountain range and belongs to the central subtropical monsoon climate zone. It is recognized as the largest and best-preserved subtropical primary forest ecosystem in Southeast China and serves as a gene bank for wildlife in the central subtropical zone of China. As of 2022, 2,970 people live in the biosphere reserve, whose livelihoods consist mainly of tea and bamboo processing.

299. Wuyishan, named after the nearby Wuyi mountain range, was listed as a World Heritage site in 1999 for its cultural, scenic and biodiversity values (criteria iii, vi, vii and x). In addition, the Wuyishan National Park, which spans Fujian and Jiangxi Provinces, was officially established in September 2021 as one of China's first five national parks, following a pilot national park designation in 2016. As a result, the Wuyishan Biosphere Reserve is now situated at the centre of the national park and the World Heritage site. The management system of the Wuyishan National Park, which fully encompasses the biosphere reserve, has since then served as the basis for the biosphere reserve's management.

300. The total area (56,527 ha) and zonation of the biosphere reserve have remained unchanged since the last periodic review. However, the zonation of a national protected area within the biosphere reserve has changed. Before Wuyishan National Park was established as a pilot in 2016, the core area and buffer zone of the Wuyishan Biosphere Reserve were identical to those of the Wuyishan National Nature Reserve. Following the National Park designation, the entire core area and part of the buffer zone of the biosphere reserve became the core protection area of the national park, while the rest of the buffer zone and the transition area were designated as the general control area of the national park. As a result, the site's protection regime has become stricter.

301. The Advisory Committee noted that a large portion of the two core areas is not surrounded by the buffer zone or transition area, for which the previous periodic review also requested an explanation. In the current periodic review report, the management authority stated that the biosphere reserve has been integrated into the World Heritage site and the national park, and is under the strictest possible protection.

302. Additionally, the biosphere reserve has actively coordinated with local governments to advance construction of the Wuyishan National Park Rim Conservation and Development Belt, and has been promoting an eco-friendly development model for tea, bamboo and ecotourism.

303. The Advisory Committee concluded that this biosphere reserve **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

304. Based on the information provided in the present periodic review report, the establishment of the Wuyishan National Park, which encompasses all zones of the Wuyishan Biosphere Reserve, fully ensures the buffering function for the core areas. At the same time, however, the presence of the national park has made the existing biosphere reserve zonation scheme redundant. The Committee therefore strongly recommended that the authorities review and update the zonation of the biosphere reserve so that it aligns with the Statutory Framework and takes into account the zonation and management framework provided by the national park and World Heritage site, enabling it to act in a complementary manner with these designations. The Committee recommended that the updated zonation scheme be submitted by **30 September 2027**.

305. The Advisory Committee furthermore encouraged the responsible authorities to provide more policy support and funding for green industries, such as eco-friendly tea and ecotourism, and consider using the biosphere reserve's international brand to advance local economic development.

306. Finally, the Advisory Committee requested that the relevant authority submit the shapefiles for the biosphere reserve to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**.

307. **Yading Biosphere Reserve (China).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the second periodic review report of the Yading Biosphere Reserve, and commended the progress made since its designation in 2003 and the first periodic review in 2013. The Advisory Committee acknowledged the comprehensive and well-structured periodic review procedure, which included the collection and examination of data, an initial appraisal, on-site inspections and review meetings, and ensured the engagement of diverse stakeholders such as public authorities, local entrepreneurs, residents, tourists and academic researchers.

308. The Yading Biosphere Reserve is situated at the border between the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. It features primary natural landscapes such as snow-capped peaks, glaciers, seas, canyons and pristine forests. The reserve provides habitats for a wide variety of animals while protecting numerous rare and endangered species. The forest within the reserve is home to species such as *Quercus aquifolioides*, *Pinus densata*, larch, spruce, fir, rhododendron and rose.

309. The Advisory Committee observed that the biosphere reserve is managed by the Yading National Nature Reserve Management Bureau of the Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, as outlined in the 2024–2033 Management Plan. This plan guides reserve activities over the next decade, including setting goals and guidelines for construction, development, conservation management, research and monitoring, public education and outreach, and international cooperation.

310. The Advisory Committee also noted that the total area and zoning have remained unchanged since the biosphere reserve's first periodic review in 2013, while the human population has more than doubled from 992 people in 2013 to 2,153 in 2023

in the transition area. There is no population in the core area or buffer zone.

311. The Advisory Committee recognized the substantial progress made in fulfilling the three core functions of the biosphere reserve following the first periodic review in 2013. It underscored the strengthening of ecosystem services in coniferous and broad-leaved forests, shrubs, meadows, wetlands and glaciers across the core area and buffer zone, the identification of previously unrecorded species through cooperation with academic and scientific institutions, and the execution of numerous programmes designed to support and enhance the well-being of local communities.

312. The Advisory Committee concluded that the Yading Biosphere Reserve **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Advisory Committee recommended that the management authorities collaborate more closely with other biosphere reserves within the World Network to share their experiences, strengthen the efforts for sustainable tourism management and encourage efforts to expand sustainable development initiatives.

313. Finally, the Advisory Committee requested that the relevant authority submit the shapefiles for the biosphere reserve to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**.

314. **Yancheng Biosphere Reserve (China).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the third periodic review report of the Yancheng Biosphere Reserve, and commended the progress made since its second periodic review in 2013.

315. Yancheng Biosphere Reserve serves as a crucial stopover on the East Asian-Australasian migratory bird route and an important ecological link connecting different avian habitats. As the most intact coastal wetland protection area in Yancheng, covering over half of the city's coastal wetlands, the site is China's largest coastal natural reserve. The biosphere reserve focuses primarily on protecting rare wetland wildlife species, such as the red-crowned crane, and their vital coastal habitats. It preserves extensive pristine coastal landscapes untouched by human activities, and is one of China's few remaining original coastal ecosystems. The reserve comprehensively showcases the geological and ecological processes of coastal wetland formation and vegetation succession.

316. The Advisory Committee recognized the systematic and thoroughly organized periodic review process, which comprised data acquisition and analysis, a preliminary evaluation, field assessments and formal review sessions, while facilitating the participation of a broad range of stakeholders, including governmental bodies, business representatives, local inhabitants, visitors and members of the scientific community.

317. The Advisory Committee also noted that the total area has remained almost unchanged with a slight zonation change in the buffer zone from 56,742 ha to 56,770 ha, and the transition area from 167,922 ha to 167,894 ha, effected since the biosphere reserve's second periodic review in 2013. The site, which has a long, narrow shape, currently covers 247,260 ha. The human population in the buffer zone has increased from 5,000 in 2013 to 11,404 in 2024, and in the transition area from 50,000 in 2013 to 74,220 in 2024.

318. The Advisory Committee concluded that the Yancheng Biosphere Reserve **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Committee further advised the management authorities to: (i) enhance cooperation with other biosphere reserves within the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, in order to exchange knowledge and best practices; (ii) reinforce sustainable tourism governance in response to accelerating visitor numbers, including measures to reduce the adverse effects of uncontrolled tourism activities; and (iii) promote further expansion of sustainable development programmes and actions. The Advisory Committee also encouraged the relevant authorities to undertake special efforts to harmonize the management of the biosphere reserve and the World Heritage site, to

create synergies and added value.

319. The Advisory Committee requested the relevant authorities to submit the shapefiles for the biosphere reserve to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**.

320. **West Estonian Archipelago Biosphere Reserve (Estonia).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the third periodic review from the West Estonian Biosphere Reserve, designated in 1990.

321. The West Estonian Archipelago Biosphere Reserve is located in the central eastern Baltic Sea and comprises a complex mosaic of terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems across five municipalities (Saaremaa, Hiiumaa, Muhu, Vormsi and Ruhnu). The site includes forests, alvars, wetlands, coastal meadows, shallow marine waters and island landscapes shaped by long-standing, low-intensity land use. The reserve supports high biodiversity value, including habitats and species of international importance, and hosts a population of approximately 44,500 inhabitants, largely concentrated in the transition areas. The biosphere reserve integrates conservation objectives with sustainable development approaches in an island and coastal context.

322. The previous IACBR recommendations following the 2015 periodic review focused primarily on: (i) clarifying the zonation and buffer zones surrounding core areas, and (ii) strengthening participatory governance and stakeholder involvement. The Advisory Committee noted with satisfaction that the requested clarifications regarding zonation were submitted and accepted in 2017, and included higher-resolution maps and a legal justification for the buffer zones. Furthermore, participatory processes have since been strengthened through the establishment of regional action centres and an advisory board. The current periodic review was prepared through a structured and consultative process coordinated by the Saaremaa and Hiiumaa regional action centres, involving local authorities, development organizations, universities, national institutions and the Biosphere Reserve Advisory Board.

323. The Advisory Committee noted the completion of an institutional transition in 2023, shifting coordination from the national Environmental Board to two locally based action centres. This governance reform strengthened community-based governance, regional ownership and responsiveness to local conditions. It also noted that the adoption of the Strategy and Action Plan 2023–2030 provides a coherent, participatory and forward-looking framework aligned with the three biosphere reserve functions.

324. Regarding the three functions, the Advisory Committee commended the legal protection of the core area and buffer zone under Estonia's Nature Conservation Act, which contribute to national and international biodiversity targets, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework; the increased emphasis on sustainable tourism, green and blue economy initiatives, local entrepreneurship and nature-based solutions; and the strong engagement with universities, international projects, youth initiatives and regional biosphere reserve networks (e.g. EuroMAB, NordMAB, Baltic Sea cooperation).

325. The Advisory Committee observed that a few challenges remain, including the fact that the biosphere reserve continues to operate without formal regulatory authority in spatial planning or land-use decision-making, which limits its visibility and influence at the national policy level. Financial resources remain relatively modest and project-based, affecting long-term operational stability. Finally, while the zonation is legally secured, the continued explanation of functional relationships between core, buffer and transition areas – particularly where buffer zones are not spatially continuous – is not sufficiently clear for purposes of international comparison.

326. The Advisory Committee concluded that the West Estonian Archipelago Biosphere Reserve **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Committee congratulated the authorities and stakeholders on the

successful governance reform, strengthened local ownership, and sustained commitment to integrating conservation, sustainable development and logistical functions.

327. The Advisory Committee encouraged the competent authorities to:

a. Continue strengthening the visibility and recognition of the biosphere reserve concept within national policy frameworks and sectoral strategies.

b. Further consolidate the role of the biosphere reserve as a demonstration and learning site for sustainable island and coastal development.

c. Maintain and expand stable financial and human resources for coordination beyond short-term project funding.

d. Continue participation and leadership within regional and thematic networks of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

e. Clearly document and communicate the functional integrity of the zonation, particularly in areas where buffer zones are ensured through legal or management mechanisms rather than spatial continuity.

328. **Sheka Biosphere Reserve (Ethiopia).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the first periodic review of the Sheka Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2012, a globally significant site integrating rich biodiversity with the unique biocultural heritage of the Shekacho people.

329. Located in Ethiopia's South West Peoples' Regional State, the reserve spans three administrative districts (Masha, Anderacha and Yeki) and includes the towns of Tepi and Masha. The Sheka Biosphere Reserve forms part of the Afromontane ecoregion, which is dominated by Moist Montane Rainforests, intact high forests, bamboo thickets, wetlands and sacred/cultural forests known as Kobo. The reserve supports over 458 higher plant species and 367 animal species, including endemic and threatened mammals and birds.

330. As of 2024, the human population within the reserve totals approximately 339,915, concentrated mainly in the transition area. Communities practice mixed farming, livestock rearing and sustainable harvesting of forest products such as wild coffee, honey and spices. Participatory Forest Management and traditional governance systems (Kobo, Gudo and Dedo) are actively integrated into reserve management. The biosphere reserve also hosts ecotourism sites and benefits from research and capacity-building partnerships with Mizan-Tepi University and the Tepi Agricultural Research Centre. Recent adjustments to zonation redistributed the core, buffer and transition areas to better align conservation and development objectives.

331. The Advisory Committee commended the Sheka Biosphere Reserve on its participatory periodic review process, the updated management plan and the integration of traditional governance structures. The Committee also noted the challenges posed by expanding coffee and tea plantations, heavy reliance on external funding and rapid population growth, increasing the risk of encroachment in the transition area.

332. The Advisory Committee was **unable to determine** whether this biosphere reserve meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and asked the concerned authority to submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**:

a. A zonation map with an appropriate legend to address inconsistencies in the sizes of the three zones (sizes shown in the zonation map are not the same as the sizes stated in the report).

b. A detailed budget for the management of the biosphere reserve, rather than approximate

values.

c. The revised Management Plan referenced in the periodic review report, covering all three zones.

333. **Kafa Biosphere Reserve (Ethiopia).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the first periodic review of the Kafa Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2010, a globally significant site recognized as the birthplace of Arabica coffee (*Coffea arabica*).

334. Located in the Kafa Zone of Ethiopia's Southwest Peoples' Regional State, the reserve forms part of the Eastern Afromontane Biodiversity Hotspot and is dominated by moist evergreen Afromontane ('cloud') forests. The reserve also includes bamboo thickets, wetlands, mountain forests and grassland complexes, supporting over 259 higher plant species, 936 faunal species and more than 270 fungal species, some newly described.

335. Agriculture remains the primary economic activity, with local communities practising mixed crop-livestock farming and sustainably harvesting non-timber forest products such as wild coffee, honey and spices. Participatory Forest Management is implemented across the reserve, and ecotourism is growing, supported by sites like the National Coffee Museum in Bonga.

336. The reserve covers approximately 742,268 ha, including a core area of 39,174 ha, a buffer zone of 201,792 ha and a transition area of 441,976 ha. The human population in the transition area has increased from 657,780 in 2010 to approximately 1,213,632 in 2023. There are no permanent residents in the core area or buffer zones. Key achievements over the past decade include expanded research and monitoring, improved social services (health, education, water, energy) and increased tourism activities.

337. The Advisory Committee congratulated the Kafa Coffee Biosphere Reserve on a well-prepared periodic review and the effective implementation of biosphere reserve functions. The Committee recognized the challenges posed by reliance on donor funding, agricultural expansion, urbanization and the decline of traditional practices.

338. The Advisory Committee was **unable to determine** whether this biosphere reserve meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and asked the concerned authority to submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**:

a. A clearer current zonation map for 2024, alongside the 2010 nomination map, to illustrate changes in core, buffer and transition areas.

b. Clear timelines for updating and implementing the existing Management Plan.

c. A detailed budget for the management of the biosphere reserve, with specific allocations for each zone rather than total approximate values.

339. **Archipelago Sea Area Biosphere Reserve (Finland).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the third periodic review of the Archipelago Sea Area Biosphere Reserve, designated in 1994.

340. This 500,000-ha site located off the south-west coast of Finland is composed of 6,500 small islands in the inter, intermediate and outer archipelago areas, as well as a sea zone. The majority (85 per cent) of the site is composed of open ocean water. Terrestrial and marine habitats include coniferous forests, wood meadows, heaths, rocky meadows, rocky or sandy islets, arable land, seashores and open sea areas.

341. The 2017 periodic review provided positive feedback and did not include any recommendations requiring follow-up. The current periodic review is notable for its clear and dynamic description of ongoing activities and appears to have been well prepared under the leadership of the current biosphere reserve coordinator, aligned with the five-

year strategic planning cycle.

342. The core area of the biosphere reserve is the Archipelago National Park. The reserve has a resident population of approximately 3,500 people, while around 80,000 visitors arrive during the summer months, many staying in seasonal cottages. Traditional lifestyles remain closely connected to the sea; however, the declining profitability of fishing and agriculture is prompting residents to seek innovative livelihood opportunities. Recent challenges include maintaining the cultural landscape as traditional grazing practices decline, increasingly severe sea conditions and marine litter.

343. The biosphere reserve is administered by the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY) of south-west Finland, the Town of Pargas (which hosts the biosphere reserve office) and the Municipality of Kinitoön. Marine research and sustainable development activities are carried out with the local communities, universities and government partners.

344. In 2024, the biosphere reserve celebrated its 30th anniversary. Alongside this celebration, a five-year strategic planning process was launched to help develop this periodic review in a cost-efficient manner. The four main themes of the 2023–2027 strategic period are: (i) everyone can help preserve biodiversity; (ii) a healthy sea for the vitality of the archipelago; (iii) thriving islands where the individual is a strength, and (iv) the archipelago thrives on a diverse and sustainable economy. The biosphere reserve also established three operating principles that permeate all site activities:

a. Through knowledge and experiences, people's relationship with nature and culture is deepened and their capacity to act is strengthened to contribute to a sustainable future.

b. The biosphere reserve with its UNESCO status unites and inspires, and shared successes are celebrated by everyone.

c. The biosphere reserve is a model for sustainable development locally, nationally and internationally.

345. This periodic review proposes expansions of both the marine and terrestrial core areas, a reduction of the terrestrial buffer zone, an expansion of the marine buffer zone, a reduction of the marine transition area and an expansion of the terrestrial transition area. The expansion of the core area corresponds to an expansion of the National Park. The population has increased from 0 to 12 in the core area and decreased in the other zones. Depopulation remains a challenge for the biosphere reserve.

346. The practice of producing annual reports as well as five-year action plans can be considered as a best practice to be replicated elsewhere. The production of the periodic review by the site coordinator, rather than an external consultant, is ideal and is reflected in the high quality of the report.

347. The Advisory Committee congratulated the relevant authorities on a very well-run site and a well-prepared periodic review. In particular, the work on education and outreach, including the Habitability Group, Biosphere Ambassadors and Biosphere Academy, is excellent. The Advisory Committee concluded that the Finland Archipelago Sea Area Biosphere Reserve **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework for Biosphere Reserves.

348. The Advisory Committee invited the biosphere reserve to incorporate the objectives and actions of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan into the management framework and next five-year strategic plan.

349. The Advisory Committee noted that while the Management Plan for the Protected Areas includes an executive summary in English, the Management Strategy for the Biosphere Reserve 2023–2027 has not been translated. The Committee requested that an English summary of this strategy be submitted by **15 May 2026** along with a land cover map with

a legend. In future submissions, the Committee asked that zonation terminology used in maps align with MAB terminology (e.g. 'transition area' rather than 'cooperation zone').

350. **Gorges du Gardon Biosphere Reserve (France).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the first periodic review from the Gorges du Gardon Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2015.

351. The biosphere reserve is located in the Gard department of southern France. It covers a total area of 45,501 ha with a core area of 7,800 ha, a buffer zone of 13,907 ha and a transition area of 23,794 ha. The site includes 26 municipalities with 250,000 inhabitants, including the towns of Uzès to the north and Nîmes to the south, which hosts the Maison Carrée World Heritage site, inscribed in 2023, as well as the Pont du Gard, a World Heritage site inscribed in 1985 and located within the core area.

352. The biosphere reserve hosts a Mediterranean landscape composed of garrigue scrubland, holm oaks, the Gardon River and cliffs, and is home to threatened and protected species such as the Egyptian vulture, Bonelli's eagle and the woodcock orchid. This region is known for its rich cultural, architectural and historical heritage. The main human activities are agriculture, tourism (450,000 visitors per year) and services (64 per cent of the economic institutions surveyed). A notable agricultural activity is wine production, which employs many local residents in the buffer zone. In addition, a limited quantity of very high-quality olive oil (Picholine) has been produced near Nîmes since 2006. The region also produces truffles (*Tuber melanosporum*) and medicinal and aromatic plants.

353. The Advisory Committee welcomed the 2025–2035 Action Plan for management of the biosphere reserve and encouraged greater consideration of connections with the objectives and actions of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan.

354. The Advisory Committee acknowledged the presence of extraction and cutting activities for 'noble' stone in Vers-Pont-du-Gard and Castillon-du-Gard; however, it was unclear whether such activities take place in the transition area, buffer zone or core area. The Advisory Committee also noted the presence of a military camp in the core area at Garrigues, recognizing the important role that military bases can play in nature conservation. However, it recommended that the biosphere reserve undertake adequate monitoring to ensure that military training activities do not impact the conservation function of the core area. Depending on the monitoring outcomes, the biosphere reserve may wish to consider re-zoning (some portion of) this section as a buffer zone or transition area. In both cases, the biosphere reserve may want to invite relevant mining and military representatives to participate in the management and governance body.

355. The Advisory Committee commended the Gorges du Gardon Biosphere Reserve on the well-prepared periodic review and a very successful ten years of project implementation. The Committee concluded that this site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

356. The Advisory Committee requested the authorities to submit the following information by **15 May 2026**:

a. A socio-economic impact and environmental impact assessment of the extraction and cutting of 'noble' stone in Vers-Pont-du-Gard and Castillon-du-Gard, based on national laws and regulations and related mitigation measures to maintain ecological integrity.

b. The MABNet Directory of Biosphere Reserves Summary.

357. **Ledro Alps and Judicaria Biosphere Reserve (Italy).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the first periodic review report of the Ledro Alps and Judicaria Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2015.

358. The site is located in the Trentino–Alto Adige region of northern Italy. It encompasses the southern slopes of the central eastern Alps and contains a wide range of habitats, creating a biodiversity corridor running north–south between the Po Valley and the northern Alps. The area also includes two prehistoric sites at Lake Ledro and Lake Carera–Fiavè, both inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The total population remains steady at 15,800 inhabitants, whose principal economic activities are tourism and agriculture.

359. The Advisory Committee observed that no changes have been proposed to the area of the biosphere reserve or the zonation; however, advances in technology have permitted the refinement of existing figures. The total area of the site covers 47,443 ha, with terrestrial core areas of 4,787 ha, terrestrial buffer zones of 15,779 ha and a terrestrial transition area of 26,876 ha. The zonation comprises all required types of zones and complies with the Statutory Framework.

360. The Advisory Committee noted that the three biosphere reserve functions are implemented in a well-balanced manner, supported by sufficient funding, staffing and execution in accordance with the Management Plan. The biosphere reserve has initiated and implemented a range of shared projects co-financed with local stakeholders. The Advisory Committee also noted several projects, including initiatives to develop a local cereal supply chain, research projects focused on forest diversity in chestnut and walnut trees and on improving water-use efficiency through scientific research and training, a study assessing the benefits of mulching techniques for the traditional Nostrano di Storo maize variety, and participation in a project promoting collaboration between local restaurateurs and food producers through a gastronomic competition among Italian biosphere reserves. As tourism is a prevailing sector in the area, many projects are focused on visitor management and tourism impact.

361. The governance structure is participatory and inclusive, and consists of three bodies: the Permanent Secretariat of the biosphere reserve, headed by its President, who serves as the official representative of the site; the Executive Committee, responsible for implementing the three functions, managing the zonation system, ensuring coordination, overseeing operational management and supporting decision-making; and the Steering Committee, which acts as the general assembly and includes local representatives of major provincial associations of farmers, hunters, environmental organizations and the Pro Ecomuseo ‘dalle Dolomiti al Garda’ association.

362. The site has a communication plan and collaborates with other Italian biosphere reserves, as well as participating in the Mountain Biosphere Reserves Network and MAB World Youth Forums.

363. The Advisory Committee concluded that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Advisory Committee requested the authorities to provide an executive summary of the Biosphere Reserve Management Plan in English by **15 May 2026** and encouraged them to share their experience and know-how in the field of tourism management with other members of the WNBR.

364. **Po Delta Biosphere Reserve (Italy).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the first periodic review of the Po Delta Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2015.

365. The site encompasses one of the most extensive and ecologically significant delta systems in the Mediterranean region. The biosphere reserve includes a complex mosaic of wetlands, river channels, lagoons, coastal dunes, agricultural landscapes and settlements shaped by long-standing interactions between natural processes and human activities. The area has a high biodiversity value, hosting habitats and species of international importance, and supports a range of economic activities such as agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture, tourism and nature-based recreation. The biosphere

reserve aims to serve as a platform for research, monitoring, education and stakeholder cooperation within a highly dynamic delta environment.

366. The Advisory Committee commended the major accomplishments of the Po Delta Biosphere Reserve in the first decade since its designation. The biosphere reserve has contributed to strengthening the visibility of the biosphere reserve concept in a complex and highly managed delta landscape. The Committee acknowledged the efforts made to promote sustainable development initiatives, enhance cooperation among local authorities and support conservation objectives within existing protected areas. The integration of the biosphere reserve framework with ongoing regional and national conservation policies has provided a basis for aligning biodiversity protection with socio-economic activities, particularly in relation to wetlands management, sustainable tourism and environmental education.

367. The Advisory Committee noted the need for clarification regarding the presence of small polygons in the core areas on zonation maps, and encouraged the biosphere reserve to consult with the MAB Secretariat to ensure compliance with technical specifications.

368. The Advisory Committee concluded that this biosphere reserve **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. However, it requested the concerned authority to submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**:

a. Clarification regarding approximately six small polygons of buffer zone that appear in the core areas on the zonation maps. Please provide an explanation of these polygons and how they relate to the current zonation of the biosphere reserve, including the logic of including small areas of buffer zone in the core area.

369. **Tuscan Islands Biosphere Reserve (Italy).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the second periodic review of the Tuscan Islands Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2003. The 2016 periodic review included a major expansion of the site to its present form. The Tuscan Archipelago National Park coordinates the biosphere reserve and led the periodic review process.

370. The Biosphere Reserve comprises seven islands and ten municipalities located in the Mediterranean Region, covering a total of 1,079,540 ha. The region encompasses significant geological, geomorphological, biological and cultural diversity. The biosphere reserve forms part of the Tuscan Archipelago National Park, the largest marine park in Europe, and the International Sanctuary for Marine Mammals of the Mediterranean.

371. The Advisory Committee congratulated the biosphere reserve on the major accomplishments achieved since the last periodic review, which include the creation of the site's governance boards, Management Plan and communication plan.

372. The Advisory Committee noted that are no proposed changes to the spatial configuration of the biosphere reserve in the present periodic review. However, changes to the electronic map were made following instructions received from the MAB Secretariat in 2025, resulting in an increase of 595 ha to the total area of the biosphere reserve, with a decrease of 59 ha in the core area (from 5,807 ha to 5,748 ha).

373. The main economic activity in the area is tourism, closely linked to natural coastal landscapes and prehistoric heritage sites, with 2,785,643 people visiting during the summer months. The biosphere reserve has improved its understanding of visitor impacts and is focusing on stakeholder engagement to build a more sustainable approach to tourism that protects natural and cultural heritage. It has also strengthened its partnerships with national research bodies and universities. In 2015, the site began the tourism qualification process for certification under the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism certification.

374. The biosphere reserve focuses on several key objectives: (i) conserving biodiversity

with particular attention to the restoration of endangered species and habitats; (ii) promoting traditional products not only as expressions of local culture but also as practical tools for addressing climate change; (iii) developing sustainable tourism that balances biodiversity conservation and the protection of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage with the socio-economic development of the local community; (iv) providing environmental education for younger generations through programmes that explore the relationship between people and the environment; and (v) supporting scientific research and monitoring to strengthen knowledge, inform decision-making, and adapt actions in response to sustainable development challenges and climate change.

375. The Advisory Committee observed that monitoring in the biosphere reserve has focused on the conservation of wildlife, the reintroduction of native species and removal of the invasive species. Tied to this research, the biosphere reserve has made improvements to habitat management. In recognition of this success, the National Park was awarded IUCN Green List status in 2021. This work can serve as a model for other biosphere reserves.

376. The biosphere reserve has been extremely successful in fundraising over the past five years and is to be commended for this important work, especially as it relates to climate change and UNESCO sites.

377. The Advisory Committee offered its congratulations on the implementation of the 2021–2025 Biosphere Reserve Action Plan and encouraged the biosphere reserve to take into account the objectives and actions of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan as they develop their next Biosphere Reserve Action Plan, due to take effect in 2026.

378. The Advisory Committee was **unable to determine** whether this biosphere reserve meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and requested the concerned authority to submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**:

a. A map clearly indicating the overlap between the biosphere reserve designation and the Tuscan Archipelago National Park.

b. Clarification of apparent discrepancies in population numbers between Table 2.2.3 on p. 24 and Table J on p. 15.

c. A copy of the executive summary of the Biosphere Reserve Action Plan 2021–2025 (Management Plan) in English, French or Spanish.

379. Finally, the Advisory Committee recommended the development of new marine core areas over the next ten years, as the present core area represents a very small percentage (1 per cent) of the total biosphere reserve area.

380. **Collemeluccio-Montedimezzo Alto Molise Biosphere Reserve (Italy).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the first periodic review report of the Collemeluccio-Montedimezzo Alto Molise Biosphere Reserve, designated in 1977 and extended in 2014.

381. Located in the Molise region of south-central Italy, the biosphere reserve features a cultural landscape shaped by millennia of human activity while remaining rich in biodiversity. Deciduous broadleaf Turkey oak and beech forests, grasslands and shrub lands form characteristic ecosystems within the site. The population of 4,361 inhabitants is scattered in small villages throughout the reserve. The main economic activities are agriculture, small industries and tourism.

382. The Advisory Committee noted that there have been no changes in the previously published area or zonation data. The total area remains 25,267 ha, with terrestrial core areas of 1,367 ha, a terrestrial buffer zone of 11,967 ha and a terrestrial transition area of 11,933 ha. The zonation consists of all required types of zones and complies

with the Statutory Framework.

383. The three functions are carried out in a balanced manner, with funding that is adequate yet irregular and mostly project oriented. The staff, recruited from the ASSOMAB Consortium, collaborate with a wide range of partners on initiatives focused on nature conservation and sustainable development. Education and research activities with the University of Molise fulfil the logistical support function.

384. The Advisory Committee noted with concern that while partial management plans are in effect, the site lacks a formal Biosphere Reserve Management or Action Plan, and although one is planned, no progress updates or a specific timeline have been provided.

385. The governance structure depends on the ASSOMAB Consortium, which currently serves as the coordinating body of the biosphere reserve, through the Consortium Assembly, composed of the mayors of all municipalities, the Head of the Carabinieri Command of the Forest, Environmental and Agri-food units – Department of Isernia, the Rector of the University of Molise and the Representative of the Molise Region.

386. The site is active within the WNBR, takes part in the Mediterranean Biosphere Reserve Network and has joined the Mountain Biosphere Reserves Network. The Advisory Committee took particular note of the MABTWIN project, a partnership with the Spanish Alto Turia Biosphere Reserve.

387. Despite these achievements, the Advisory Committee was **unable to determine** whether the site meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, due to the lack of a specific Management or Action Plan for the biosphere reserve. The Advisory Committee therefore requested the authorities to submit an outline for the management plan covering the entire biosphere reserve to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**.

388. The Advisory Committee recommended that the biosphere reserve adopt a participative approach to the development of the plan, drawing on existing partial management plans, incorporating elements of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan and following closely the Technical Guidelines for Biosphere Reserves. The Advisory requested the authorities to submit a complete management plan to the MAB Secretariat by **30 September 2028.**

389. Despite evidence of adequate participation in the governance of the biosphere reserve, the Advisory Committee further recommended the establishment of a specific management/implementation unit to further improve all governance processes and enhance the positive impacts of the biosphere reserve on the region.

390. **Dana Biosphere Reserve (Jordan).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the second periodic review report of the Dana Biosphere Reserve, designated in 1998, and following the first periodic review in 2014.

391. The biosphere reserve covers 29,150 ha, encompassing a system of mountains and wadis from the eastern Rift Valley to the Wadi Araba desert lowlands, with an elevation drop of over 1,600 m. It includes three major biogeographical zones and four distinct vegetation zones, supporting high biodiversity. Notable vegetation includes Phoenician juniper formations and the last remaining examples of Mediterranean cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*) in the region. The reserve is also recognized as an Important Bird Area (IBA). All 387 permanent residents, including Bedouin pastoralists, live in the buffer zones and transition areas, with an increase of 72 families since the last report.

392. The Dana Biosphere Reserve continues to play a critical role in biodiversity conservation and ecosystem integrity. Conservation measures focus on protecting breeding habitats, regulating visitor activities, controlling picnicking and woodcutting, and raising awareness through educational programmes. A 2016 botanical survey recorded 891

plant species, a 37 per cent increase from 1994, including several endemic and potentially new species. Forest health monitoring has been conducted since 2021 to assess climate change impacts.

393. Community engagement has increased through advisory meetings, the recruitment of local staff and income-generating projects. Partnerships with civil society and tourism operators have strengthened, supporting sustainable livelihoods and ecotourism development. Between 2013 and 2024, infrastructure upgrades included renovated visitor accommodations, improved roads and field stations, and a wastewater treatment facility.

394. In 2023, a new five-year management plan was adopted through inclusive consultations, integrating conservation, development and community objectives. The plan emphasizes adaptive management and improved coordination among government agencies, NGOs and local stakeholders. Research and monitoring programmes have expanded, covering biodiversity, habitat health, ecosystem services and socio-economic surveys to inform adaptive strategies.

395. Socio-economic initiatives have promoted women's employment through cooperatives in handicrafts and food processing, providing alternative livelihoods and supporting sustainable land use. The experiences of the Dana Biosphere Reserve have been shared regionally and internationally through MAB workshops, conferences and exchanges. Youth engagement has been strengthened through the Nature Knight initiative, fostering future environmental leaders.

396. The Advisory Committee commended the report for reflecting the Dana Biosphere Reserve's dynamic and integrated approach to conservation, ecotourism, community empowerment and sustainability. It concluded that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

397. **Mujib Biosphere Reserve (Jordan).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the first periodic review report of the Mujib Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2011. Located in the central highlands of the southern Jordan Valley, the reserve borders the shores of the Dead Sea and the Rift Valley escarpment. It hosts significant biodiversity, including approximately 300 plant species and numerous resident and migratory bird species. The number of permanent inhabitants increased from 206 in 2010 to 604 in 2025. The main livelihood activities include grazing, agriculture and ecotourism.

398. The Advisory Committee noted that no formal re-zonation or extension file was submitted to the MAB Secretariat in 2015, when the boundaries of the transition area were revised as part of an adaptive management approach to strengthen the protection of hydrologically sensitive wadi systems and improve integrated catchment management. The updated map reflecting the extended transition area was therefore presented without prior notification or justification.

399. Regarding the management framework, reference is made to four successive management plans; however, it remains unclear whether these plans cover the entire biosphere reserve, including the revised transition area.

400. Several activities within the biosphere reserve raised concerns, including mining, quarrying and oil extraction, unsustainable agricultural practices, overgrazing in the transition area, water pollution and a fourfold increase in visitor numbers over the past three years. These pressures require a clearer assessment of their environmental impacts and corresponding mitigation measures.

401. The Advisory Committee was **unable to determine** whether the site meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. Therefore, the Advisory Committee requested that the national authorities submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**:

a. A comprehensive explanation of the revised zonation and extension, including their impacts on the three functions of the biosphere reserve, accompanied by an updated zonation map and a revised table of area changes (section Summary i).

b. A single shapefile prepared in accordance with MAB guidelines, correcting identified inconsistencies (including overlaps with the West Bank border and overlaps between polygons).

c. Detailed information on environmental impact assessments and mitigation measures related to mining, quarrying, oil extraction, unsustainable agriculture and overgrazing, water pollution and increased visitor pressure.

402. The Advisory Committee also requested the authorities to submit the following information not submitted in the periodic review form to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**:

a. A list of relevant legal documents.

b. A list of land-use and management/cooperation plans.

c. Updated vegetation and land cover maps corresponding to the revised boundaries.

d. An updated list of fauna.

e. A list of key bibliographic references.

403. The Advisory Committee further recommended that the authorities provide supporting documentation and photos and videos of implemented activities, including conservation and monitoring.

404. **Inlay Lake Biosphere Reserve (Myanmar).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the first periodic review report of the Inlay Lake Biosphere Reserve, and commended the progress made since its designation in 2015.

405. The Inlay Lake Biosphere Reserve aims to conserve the region's unique freshwater ecosystem and biodiversity, including its endemic species. It seeks to promote sustainable development that balances ecological protection with the socio-economic needs of local communities. The reserve fosters scientific research, environmental education and monitoring. It also works to safeguard the distinct cultural heritage and traditional practices of the Intha people.

406. The Advisory Committee recognized that the Inlay Lake Biosphere Reserve was listed as an Important Bird Area in 2004 due to its importance as a critical staging post on the East Asia-Australasian Flyway of migratory birds from Siberia to Australia. The Inlay Lake Wildlife Sanctuary was also designated as an ASEAN Heritage Park in December 2003. In 2018, the biosphere reserve was designated as a Ramsar Site.

407. The Advisory Committee acknowledged the carefully coordinated and methodically implemented periodic review process, which encompasses information collection and evaluation, an initial assessment phase, site-based reviews and structured consultation meetings, and promotes the active involvement of a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including public institutions, private sector actors, community residents, tourists and researchers.

408. The Advisory Committee also noted that the total area (489,721 ha) and zoning have remained unchanged since the biosphere reserve's designation 2015, while the human population has increased in the buffer zone from 172,470 in 2013 to 184,125 people in 2025, as well as in the transition area from 1,125,500 people in 2013 to 1,729,841 in 2025.

409. The Advisory Committee concluded that the Inlay Lake Biosphere Reserve **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Committee further recommended that the responsible authorities:

a. Strengthen cooperation and exchange within the World Network of Biosphere Reserves with a view to enhancing mutual learning and the dissemination of good practices.

b. Further develop and implement integrated, sustainable tourism management strategies in response to increasing visitor pressure, including appropriate regulatory and monitoring measures to mitigate negative impacts on the ecological, social and economic functions of the biosphere reserve.

c. Continue to promote and scale up sustainable development actions consistent with the three interrelated functions of biosphere reserves and the objectives of the MAB Programme, in line with the Statutory Framework.

410. The Advisory Committee further requested that the relevant authorities submit the photos, videos and the signed Annex II forms of the periodic review report (Agreement Granting Non-Exclusive Rights) to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**.

411. **Babia Gora Biosphere Reserve (Poland).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the latest periodic review of the Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve, designated in 1976, whose last review was submitted in 2013–2014.

412. The Babia Gora Biosphere Reserve is one of the oldest biosphere reserves in the WNBR, and encompasses a representative mosaic of Western Carpathian mountain ecosystems, including natural and near-natural forests, alpine and subalpine habitats, semi-natural grasslands, managed forests and rural landscapes. Human activity varies across the site, from strict protection in the core area to sustainable land-use practices in the buffer zones and transition areas.

413. The Advisory Committee noted with satisfaction that the periodic review addresses previous recommendations of the MAB-ICC, particularly regarding zonation, integrated management, stakeholder participation, cooperation within the WNBR and progress towards the creation of a transboundary reserve with Slovakia. Substantial progress has also been made in zonation and legal clarity, including the consolidation and expansion of the core area under the Nature Conservation Plan for Babia Góra National Park (2019–2038), ensuring long-term protection. The Advisory Committee noted that the total area of the biosphere reserve did not change (11,792 ha), with a slight increase of the core area (1,125 to 1,229 ha) and a slight decrease of the buffer zone (2,267 to 2,163 ha).

414. Key achievements include strengthened conservation through legally binding instruments, continued scientific research and monitoring, active environmental education and greater integration of environmental considerations into local development strategies. Stakeholder engagement and dialogue across zones have also improved. The Advisory Committee commended the clarification of zonation and the establishment of the Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve Coordination Council in 2023, which provides a structured multi-stakeholder platform with public authorities, local governments, civil society, cultural institutions and community representatives.

415. The Advisory Committee noted a number of remaining challenges including the lack of formal recognition of biosphere reserves in national law, which limits institutional visibility, funding and operational capacity, as well as the absence of permanent coordination staff. A Management Plan is under preparation with stakeholder involvement, but has not yet been finalized or formally adopted. Limited progress has been made towards enhanced engagement with the WNBR and the establishment of a Polish-Slovak transboundary biosphere reserve.

416. The Advisory Committee concluded that Babia Góra **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and recognized the substantial progress made since the previous review, particularly in zonation, core area protection and governance. The Advisory Committee encouraged the authorities to finalize and

implement the biosphere reserve-specific Management Plan, further strengthen governance and operational capacity, and fully leverage the reserve as a model for integrated conservation and sustainable development.

417. **Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve (South Africa).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the first periodic review of the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2015, a globally unique cluster-type reserve located primarily in the Western Cape Province, with a small portion extending into the Eastern Cape. The reserve spans semi-arid regions, montane ranges (Swartberg and Langeberg-Outeniqua) and coastal environments along the Indian Ocean. The reserve encompasses three biodiversity hotspots – the Cape Floristic Region, Succulent Karoo and Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany Thicket – and includes four UNESCO World Heritage sites: Swartberg Complex, Boosmansbos Nature Reserve, Western Baviaanskloof and Pinnacle Point Site Complex.

418. The Advisory Committee noted a slight increase in the total area of the biosphere reserve, from 3,187,893 ha as reported in the 2015 nomination form to 3,189,531 ha under the proposed zonation. This change reflects an increase in both the core and transition areas, alongside a significant decrease in the buffer zone. Under the original zonation, the reserve included 605,675 ha of terrestrial core areas and 3,169 ha of marine core areas, 1,966,593 ha of terrestrial buffer zones, and 612,454 ha of terrestrial transition areas. Under the proposed zonation, it comprises 703,226 ha of terrestrial core areas and 3,488 ha of marine core areas, 1,005,704 ha of terrestrial buffer zones, and 1,477,113 ha of terrestrial transition areas, with no marine buffer zones or marine transition areas designated in either case.

419. The biosphere reserve also shows a notable increase in population, from approximately 250,200 inhabitants reported in 2015 to around 445,500 based on the 2022 census data. This includes an increase in the core areas from approximately 200 to 500 inhabitants, a slight decrease in the buffer zones from approximately 50,000 to 45,000 inhabitants, and a significant increase in the transition areas from approximately 200,000 to 400,000 inhabitants. The population is predominantly concentrated in the transition areas and consists of both rural and urban communities, with livelihoods based on agriculture (including ostrich farming, viticulture, fruit production, and livestock), ecotourism, and related services.

420. Since designation, the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve has made significant progress in governance, transitioning from the volunteer-based 'Gouritz Initiative' to a formal non-profit company with a professional board and dedicated staff. Achievements include expanded research programmes, multiple MSc and PhD collaborations, landscape-scale habitat restoration projects ('Jobs for Carbon' and 'Gouritz Corridors'), education and outreach, and the establishment of biodiversity corridors and protected areas through stewardship programmes. The biosphere reserve also actively participates in regional networks, such as AfriMAB, and hosted the 9th Meeting of the World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves in 2019.

421. The Advisory Committee commended the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve on the exemplary integration of conservation, sustainable development, and logistical support functions across the site. The Committee also noted the ongoing challenge of securing consistent funding for long-term initiatives and core operations.

422. While the Advisory Committee appreciated that the biosphere reserve authority has a management plan for each protected area in the biosphere reserve, it was **unable to determine** whether the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, due to the absence of a comprehensive management plan for the entire biosphere reserve.

423. Therefore, the Advisory Committee requested that the national authorities submit a

management plan outline for the entire biosphere reserve to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**:

424. The Advisory Committee further requested the authorities to submit a full management plan for the entire biosphere reserve by **30 September 2028.**

425. The Committee further recommended that the biosphere reserve authority make continuous efforts to manage the competing demands for water and land use, specifically regarding invasive alien plant management and river/wetland health.

426. **Magaliesberg Biosphere Reserve (South Africa).** The Advisory Committee welcomed thefirst periodic review of the Magaliesberg Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2015.

427. The Magaliesberg Biosphere Reserve is a critical conservation and sustainable development area located in the Gauteng and North West provinces of South Africa. Positioned between Johannesburg, Pretoria, Krugersdorp and Rustenburg, it includes the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site and the Magaliesberg Protected Environment. Its diverse landscapes include high-lying grasslands, forested ravines, river valleys and unique karst geology. The reserve protects several endangered vegetation types, including Egoli Granite Grassland and Marikana Thornveld, and supports over 450 bird species, more than 1,500 plant species and significant populations of Cape vultures and *Aloe peglerae.*

428. The Advisory Committee noted that the total area of the biosphere reserve did not change (357,686 ha), with an increase of the core area (57,911 to 60,993 ha) and a decrease of the buffer zone (111,247 to 108,156 ha). With approximately 552,200 residents as of 2025, most people live in the transition area, which borders dense urban and informal settlements. The reserve has experienced population growth of 33 per cent over the past decade, alongside expansion of the core area by 2,500 ha. Community-led initiatives, research partnerships, citizen science platforms and youth engagement programmes have contributed to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development within the biosphere reserve.

429. The Advisory Committee commended the Magaliesberg Biosphere Reserve for these achievements and the successful establishment of the Magaliesberg Biosphere Non-Profit Company as the management authority. However, the Committee noted key challenges, including limited staffing, pressures from urban expansion and ongoing legal and illegal mining activities.

430. Despite the significant accomplishments, the Advisory Committee was **unable to determine** whether the Magaliesberg Biosphere Reserve meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves due to the absence of a comprehensive management plan for the entire biosphere reserve.

431. Therefore, the Advisory Committee requested that the national authorities submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**:

a. A zonation map specifying the exact location of legal and illegal mining activities.

b. An updated management plan outline including measures that address the effects of mining on the biosphere reserve.

432. The Advisory Committee further requested the authorities to submit a full management plan for the entire biosphere reserve to the MAB Secretariat by **30 September 2028.**

433. **Alto Bernesga Biosphere Reserve (Spain).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the second periodic review report of the Alto Bernesga Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2005, and acknowledged the continued progress achieved in biodiversity conservation, sustainable development and logistical support.

434. The biosphere reserve has a population of 3,718 inhabitants and extends over a total area of 33,442 ha, comprising 8,637 ha designated as core areas, 14,764 ha as buffer zones, and 10,041 ha as transition areas.

435. The biosphere reserve has strengthened habitat protection within the Natura 2000 framework, advanced climate change adaptation through the ADAPT-BERNESGA project, and diversified its rural economy through ecotourism, green entrepreneurship and territorial branding initiatives. Despite ongoing demographic decline, the biosphere reserve has maintained operational capacity through diversified funding sources and active participation in national and international cooperation frameworks, including the RES-MAB project.

436. The Committee noted positively the updated version of the Action Plan 2020–2026, the establishment of monitoring mechanisms, strengthened inter-institutional cooperation and continued engagement within the Spanish Biosphere Reserve Network. It further encouraged enhanced collaboration between the two municipalities in the biosphere reserve and reinforced coordination with neighbouring biosphere reserves in the Cantabrian region, in line with previous recommendations.

437. After reviewing the periodic review report, the Advisory Committee concluded that the Alto Bernesga Biosphere Reserve **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Committee further congratulated the biosphere reserve on the excellent work carried out and the wide range of activities implemented during the reporting period.

438. **Gran Canaria Biosphere Reserve (Spain).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the second periodic review report of the Gran Canaria Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2005, and acknowledged the substantial progress achieved in conservation, sustainable development and logistical support.

439. The biosphere reserve has a population of 15,972 inhabitants and extends over a total area of 103,596.4 ha, comprising 6,423.55 ha designated as core areas, 35,939.95 ha as buffer zones, and 61,232.9 ha as transition areas. The reserve has strengthened integrated governance through the creation of the Instituto Insular, expanded protection under the Natura 2000 network, mobilized significant financial resources, and enhanced participatory mechanisms and monitoring systems. The Committee also noted the biosphere reserve's active engagement in international cooperation and its strategic alignment with multiple UNESCO designations.

440. While recognizing ongoing challenges related to tourism pressure, demographic changes and external socio-economic factors, the Committee considered that the biosphere reserve demonstrates balanced implementation of the three MAB functions and effective integration within regional planning frameworks. It encouraged continued efforts to address rural depopulation, ensure sustainable tourism management and strengthen participatory governance mechanisms.

441. After reviewing the periodic review report, the Advisory Committee concluded that the Gran Canaria Biosphere Reserve **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Committee further congratulated the biosphere reserve on the excellent work carried out, the strong institutional consolidation achieved and the wide range of activities implemented during the reporting period.

442. To further advance sustainable development within the Gran Canaria Biosphere Reserve the Advisory Committee made the following recommendations:

a. Address ongoing demographic changes and infrastructural pressures impacting socio-economic stability and conservation goals, with a focus on implementing strategic policies that address rural depopulation by incentivizing sustainable agricultural

practices and community-based initiatives.

b. Strengthen community-based tourism initiatives that incorporate local culture and environmental conservation into the visitor experience.

c. Utilize participatory planning processes to engage with local communities, ensuring their input shapes the Gran Canaria Biosphere Reserve's sustainable development trajectory.

d. Enhance collaborative efforts with stakeholders from various sectors and between government entities to ensure cohesive management strategies across all zoned areas, and to promote an integrative approach to sustainability, leveraging the Gran Canaria Biosphere Reserve's unique position as both a cultural and ecological site.

e. Prioritize proactive management plans and community engagement as key components in aligning the opportunities and challenges presented by tourism with the broader goals of sustainability and conservation.

f. Develop and implement new policies to address these concerns, focusing on the sustainability of tourism while preserving natural and cultural resources.

g. Emphasize strategic governance – as seen with the designation of technical managers and the formation of the Insular Institute – to foster a more cohesive approach to integrating tourism with existing UNESCO heritage commitments.

443. **Kristianstad Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve (Sweden).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the second periodic review report of the Kristianstads Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2005. This diverse cultural landscape, situated in Skåne, the country's southernmost province, covers about two-thirds of the municipality of Kristianstad. The population numbers up to 78,000 inhabitants, most of who are involved mainly in the food industry, agriculture, forestry, and experience-based tourism and retail.

444. The Advisory Committee noted a number of changes in the published area data since the last periodic review. The core areas are now classified as marine/limnic rather than terrestrial and have expanded by roughly 20 per cent, while the buffer zones and transition areas have decreased proportionally. The updated total area of the site covers 104,362 ha, of which 6,192 ha are terrestrial and 2,389 ha marine core areas, 14,123 ha terrestrial and 7,614 ha marine buffer zones, and 67,032 ha terrestrial and 7,012 ha marine transition areas. The zonation comprises all required types of zones and complies with the Statutory Framework.

445. The three functions are implemented in a well-balanced manner, supported by sufficient funding, staffing and execution in accordance with five-year action plans formally adopted by the Municipal Executive Committee of Kristianstad Municipality. Projects align with the functions of biosphere reserves as well as locally defined priorities. Examples include participation in the Let Sweden Blossom initiative, which encourages farmers to cultivate pollen and nectar-rich plants to support pollinators and ecosystem services; marking heritage trees as important habitats for diverse species; collaborating with golf clubs to enhance biodiversity; the Biosphere for Baltic – Future Generations project, which involves young people in biodiversity activities; and various research collaborations with Kristianstad University, the Stockholm Resilience Centre and other institutions.

446. The governance structure follows an adaptive co-management approach and is remarkably inclusive. The site is coordinated by the Biosphere Reserve Management and Naturum Unit of the Kristianstad Municipality, in close cooperation with the well-established Consultation Group for the Kristianstad Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve, which serves as an advisory body and a platform for dialogue, enabling the exchange of information and expertise among a wide range of stakeholders. The Advisory Committee praised the biosphere reserve's communication strategy, information

activities and strong international networking efforts, both within the WNBR and with external partners, which emphasizes youth engagement. The site also forms part of the Helge Model Forest, contributing the biosphere reserve perspective to the International Model Forest Network.

447. The Advisory Committee concluded that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and recommended that the proposed changes in size and zonation be approved. The Committee encouraged the biosphere reserve authorities to share nature-based solutions implemented on site, such as the construction of wetlands to reduce iron and aluminium content in the river, with other members of the WNBR.

448. **Queen Elisabeth Biosphere Reserve (Uganda)** The Advisory Committee welcomed the third periodic review of the Queen Elizabeth Biosphere Reserve, designated in 1979 following the last periodic review submitted in 2010. The Committee noted that the structure of the report follows the prescribed format and reflects a comprehensive stakeholder consultation process involving officials of the Uganda Wildlife Authority, relevant line ministries, the Uganda National Commission for UNESCO, district-level technical and political leaders, cultural authorities, and representatives of ethnic and minority groups.

449. The Queen Elizabeth Biosphere Reserve spans 479,045 ha, including 380,267 ha of terrestrial ecosystems and 98,778 ha of aquatic systems. The site encompasses a mosaic of diverse ecological systems, including tropical rainforests (Maramagambo), Acacia woodland savannahs, grassland savannahs, wetlands, and major water bodies such as lakes Edward and George, the latter forming part of Uganda's largest Ramsar site. The reserve plays a critical role in conserving biodiversity at genetic, species and ecosystem levels, hosting endangered and iconic species such as the tree-climbing lion, shoebill stork, chimpanzee and African elephant.

450. Since the previous review in 2010, several important zonation changes have been made. The Kigezi and Kyambura Wildlife Reserves, previously classified as buffer zones in accordance with their statutory instruments, have been reclassified as part of the core area following a cabinet resolution upgrading them to national park status. However, the new proposed terrestrial core area(s) and area of the new terrestrial buffer zones are not provided in hectares.

451. The Advisory Committee noted that the recommendations made by the MAB-ICC during the 2010 periodic review were not addressed in the current submission as the member state indicated that the recommendations were not available online. In addition, certain key supporting documents were not included in the dossier, notably a management plan, bibliography and letters of endorsement. While the zonation generally fulfils MAB requirements, the zoning map requires improvement and should clearly depict only the three designated zones – the core area, buffer zone and transition area.

452. In conclusion, the Advisory Committee was **unable to determine** whether the site meets or does not meet the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requested the authorities to submit the following information by **15 May 2026:**

a. An updated table that clearly indicates the new proposed terrestrial core area(s) and area of the new terrestrial buffer zones in hectares, aligned with the table on page 7 of the periodic review.

b. A revised zonation map of the biosphere reserve that clearly depicts only the three designated zones – the core area, buffer zone and transition area.

c. An outline of a management plan for the entire biosphere reserve.

453. The Advisory Committee further requested the authorities to submit a full management

plan for the entire biosphere reserve to the MAB Secretariat by **30 September 2028.**

454. The Advisory Committee further recommended that the biosphere reserve authority strengthen the participation of local communities in the development and management of the biosphere reserve and increase awareness among stakeholders of the importance of reducing pressure on resources.

455. **Langbiang Biosphere Reserve (Viet Nam).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the first periodic review report of the Langbiang Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2015. The Langbiang Biosphere Reserve is located in the northern part of Lam Dong Province in Viet Nam's Central Highlands. It is considered one of the country's four major biodiversity centres. According to 2023 data, the total human population within the biosphere reserve amounts to 425,556, an increase of 37,842 people since the site was designated.

456. The biosphere reserve is home to 11 major ethnic groups including the Kinh, K'ho, Ma, Nung, Tay and others. The area is rich in folklore, traditional festivals, customs and spiritual practices that serve as valuable assets for tourism development. Among these, the Space of Gong Culture in the Central Highlands has been recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

457. The Advisory Committee commended the authorities on the active engagement of a number of stakeholders during the periodic review process: a Participatory Rapid Appraisal involved local communities, while expert and stakeholder consultations took place at conferences, workshops and through interviews. The Advisory Committee also congratulated the efforts and achievements of the authorities in implementing the three functions of the biosphere reserve over the past decade. These include the establishment of the biosphere reserve's Management Board, the creation of two five-year management plans (2018–2022, 2024–2028), the elaboration of Operational Regulations for the Management Board, the application of sustainable livelihood development models, the implementation of biodiversity conservation activities, and the strengthening of scientific research and education for sustainable development.

458. The Advisory Committee noted the proposed change in zonation to ensure consistency between the zoning objective of the biosphere reserve and the current management status of the Bidoup-Nui Ba National Park, which constitutes the core area of the biosphere reserve. The Committee also noted the proposal to apply standardized administrative boundaries for communes and districts, which were updated in 2020. As a result of the proposed zonation change in core area (an increase of 161 ha), buffer zone (a decrease of 10,002 ha) and transition area (an increase of 936 ha), the biosphere reserve would cover a total area of 275,600 ha. The Advisory Committee further noted that the north and east boundaries of the core area are high mountain areas reaching altitudes of over 1,000 m above sea level and border other provinces.

459. The Advisory Committee concluded that the Langbiang Biosphere Reserve **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and recommended that the biosphere reserve authorities continue its efforts to address persistent challenges, such as increasing pressure from non-sustainable economic development activities and a lack of sustainable financial resources for long-term conservation and monitoring activities.

460. The Committee further encouraged the biosphere reserve authorities to expand scientific research collaboration with research institutes and universities through the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, to benefit biodiversity conservation, ensure a sustainable local economy and build the capacity of biosphere reserve staff.

461. **Red River Delta Biosphere Reserve (Viet Nam).** The Advisory Committee welcomed

the second periodic review report of the Red River Delta Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2004, following the first periodic review report submitted in 2014.

462. The biosphere reserve spans six districts across three provinces of Thai Binh, Nam Dinh and Ninh Binh in northern Viet Nam, encompassing a vast coastal zone with typical wetland ecosystems. The site hosts a rich variety of biodiversity, with over 220 bird species, including approximately 150 migratory and more than 100 waterbird species. The two core areas comprise the Xuan Thuy National Park (Nam Dinh Province) and the Tien Hai Wetland Nature Reserve (Thai Binh Province). The Xuan Thuy Ramsar Site – the first Ramsar site in Viet Nam and Southeast Asia – was designated in 1989 within the Xuan Thuy National Park.

463. Economic development in the area has traditionally focused primarily on agriculture, aquaculture and commercial services. However, coordinated investment and development of infrastructure in the biosphere reserve – including electricity, roads, schools and healthcare facilities – has had a notable impact on local livelihoods. While tourism activities in 2014 were still nascent and concentrated mainly in the core area of Xuan Thuy National Park, they have since developed comprehensively across all three zones.

464. Over the last decade, the population of the biosphere reserve has increased from 199,846 in 2014 to 1,303,251 in 2024, with the majority of inhabitants concentrated in the buffer zone and transition area. The proportion of the population living in urban areas has continued to increase, while the population in rural areas has gradually declined.

465. The Advisory Committee noted the proposed change in zonation consisting of an increase of 5,433 ha in one core area (Tien Hai Wetland Nature Reserve), an increase of 572 ha in the buffer zones (including the establishment of Thai Thuy Wetland Nature Reserve in 2019) and a decrease of 7,531 ha in the transition area. The proposed changes bring the total area of the biosphere reserve to 104,031 ha (terrestrial 105,557 ha and marine 104,031 ha) – a decrease of 1,526 ha.

466. The Advisory Committee also noted the specific challenge of managing a biosphere reserve spanning multiple provinces. The Red River Delta Biosphere Reserve is the first biosphere reserve in Viet Nam to adopt an inter-provincial co-management mechanism among the three provinces responsible for its management. Based on the regulation on the biosphere reserve management established in 2013, the chairmanship of the Biosphere Reserve Management Board, which included primary responsibility for overseeing and coordinating the activities of the biosphere reserve, was rotated every five years. However, since 2018 the rotational mechanism has not been operational and Nam Dihn Province has held the chair of the Management Board.

467. The Advisory Committee appreciated the comprehensive information and data supplied on the biosphere reserve and progress over the past decade, but noted that, in part due to the lack of an operational Management Board, the Management Plan for the biosphere reserve has not yet been formulated.

468. The Advisory Committee concluded that the Red River Delta Biosphere Reserve **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requested the authorities to develop and submit a workplan for the development of the management plan by **30 September 2027** and the complete integrated management plan by **30 September 2028**.

469. The Committee also recommended that the three provinces responsible for managing the Red River Delta Biosphere Reserve optimize and strengthen the inter-provincial co-management mechanism and establish a stable coordination framework with the relevant managing staff.

ANNEX 2: FOLLOW UP OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF PERIODIC REVIEWS

We invite you to take into account the information available in SC-26/Conf.238/10 on the Process of Excellence regarding the specific Process of Excellence step for each site.

Country	Biosphere Reserve	Comment
Algeria	Tassili N'Ajjer	Does not meet
Algeria	Djurjura	Does not meet
Argentina	Las Yungas	Meets the criteria
Colombia	El Tuparro	Meets the criteria
India	Achanakmar Amarkantak	Does not meet
India	Gulf of Mannar	Meets the criteria
India	Panchmari	Does not meet
India	Sundarbans	Does not meet
Iran	Kavir	Does not meet – Notification that the site is in conflict area
Iran	Miankaleh	Meets the criteria
Iran	Touran	Does not meet – Notification that the site is in conflict area
Iran	Urmia	Does not meet – Notification that the site is in conflict area
Italy	Somma, Vesuvio and Miglio d'Oro	Does not meet
Mexico	El Cielo	Does not meet
Mexico	Islas Marías	Does not meet
Mexico	Islas Marietas	Does not meet
Mexico	Los Volcanes	Does not meet
Mexico	Montes Azules	Does not meet
Mexico	Naha-Metzabok	Does not meet
Mexico	Sierra Gorda	Does not meet
Mexico	Sierra La Laguna	Does not meet
Paraguay	El Chaco	Does not meet
Spain	Babia	Meets the criteria
Spain	La Mancha Húmeda	Does not meet
Spain	Las Ubiñas – La Mesa	Does not meet
Spain	Muniellos	Does not meet
Spain	Valle De Laciana	Meets the criteria

Follow-up on recommendations:

470. **Tassili N'Ajjer Biosphere Reserve (Algeria).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the additional information submitted by the national authorities, but noted that it did not fully address the technical requirements. Regarding the Management Plan, the documents provided do not constitute a single workplan for the entire biosphere reserve. Instead, separate management plans were submitted for different areas of the reserve, without an integrated plan covering the biosphere reserve as a whole. Furthermore, clarification is still required regarding the boundaries of the biosphere

reserve. The Advisory Committee noted discrepancies between the zonation map submitted in the periodic review form and the map provided in response to the technical comments, with no justification provided for this issue.

471. The Advisory Committee concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Committee requested the authorities to submit a new periodic review file as well as the following elements by **30 September 2027**:

a. Clarification regarding the zonation discrepancies and a shapefile consistent with the map.

b. A comprehensive management plan for the entire biosphere reserve.

c. Documentation confirming the establishment of a coordination committee for the biosphere reserve.

The Advisory Committee encouraged the authorities to consult with the relevant officers and focal points in the UNESCO office in Rabat to seek guidance on these matters.

472. **Djurjura Biosphere Reserve (Algeria).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the additional information submitted by the national authorities, including details on the consultative process for the establishment of a management committee. With regard to the commitment to develop and approve a comprehensive management plan covering the entire biosphere reserve by 30 September 2027, the document provided by the authorities appears to constitute an outline rather than a fully developed management plan.

473. The Advisory Committee concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requested the authorities to submit a detailed and operational management plan for the biosphere reserve by **30 September 2027**. This plan should properly incorporate coordination and synergies with existing national plans, policies and strategies, and clearly define mechanisms for the meaningful involvement of local communities living within the biosphere reserve.

474. **Las Yungas Biosphere Reserve (Argentina).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the submission of the Strategic Action Plan submitted by the national authorities and acknowledged its participatory and inter-jurisdictional approach. It noted positively the updated zonation scheme, the strengthened governance structure and the establishment of inter-institutional coordination mechanisms, including the active engagement of Indigenous communities. The Committee also recognized the clear identification of key conservation values, the integration of sustainable development initiatives, and the definition of strategic objectives and actions that will guide the preparation of the forthcoming comprehensive Management Plan.

475. After reviewing the Strategic Action Plan and the supporting documentation, the Advisory Committee concluded that the biosphere reserve **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

476. **El Tuparro Biosphere Reserve (Colombia).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the additional information submitted by the national authorities and took note that the El Tuparro Biosphere Reserve currently has a Seed Committee that operates fully as a Management Committee. This Committee was established within the framework of the GEF Orinoquía Project 'Integrated Sustainable Landscapes of the Orinoquía' through a participatory process involving local and regional communities and institutions, from which the proposed governance structure for the management and oversight of the biosphere reserve was derived.

477. Regarding its formalization process, the regulatory initiative for the establishment of the

National MAB Committee is currently at the signature stage. Once formally constituted, the official establishment of the regional committees will proceed accordingly.

478. After reviewing the additional information, the Advisory Committee concluded that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

479. **Achanakmar Amarkantak Biosphere Reserve (India).** The Advisory Committee noted that the national authorities have not yet submitted the information requested at the MAB-ICC's 37th session in 2025, notably a valid management plan for the biosphere reserve. The Advisory Committee therefore concluded that the site still **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Advisory Committee called on the national authorities to submit the information requested at the 31st meeting of the IACBR in 2025 to the MAB Secretariat by **30 September 2026**.

480. **Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve (India).** The Advisory Committee acknowledged with satisfaction the additional information submitted by the national authorities in response to the request of the MAB-ICC for a zonation map with explicit mention of the transition area. The submitted zonation maps clearly show the transition area, including the legends for the three zones of the biosphere reserve. Regarding the request for an explanation as to how the ecodevelopment and ecotourism zones articulate with the other areas, the ecodevelopment zone is equivalent to the transition area of the biosphere reserve in its function of permitting human settlement and economic activities. An ecotourism zone is a special zone that falls partially within one core area and one buffer zone, as shown on the submitted map.

481. After reviewing the submitted information, the Advisory Committee concluded that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

482. **Panchmari Biosphere Reserve (India).** The Advisory Committee noted that the national authorities have not yet submitted the information requested at the MAB-ICC's 37th session in 2025, notably a valid management plan for the entire biosphere reserve. The Advisory Committee therefore concluded that the site still **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Advisory Committee called on the national authorities to submit the information requested at the 31st meeting of the IACBR in 2025 to the MAB Secretariat by **30 September 2026**.

483. **Sundarbans Biosphere Reserve (India).** The Advisory Committee acknowledged the information submitted by the national authority following the request made by the MAB-ICC at its 37th session for the following:

a. A zonation map based on a topographic layer in high resolution precisely determining the locations of the core area, buffer zone and transition area.

b. Shapefiles detailing the biosphere reserve zonation.

c. Updated information on human population numbers per zone and the general gross population.

d. A copy of the current management plan.

e. Information on how adequate protection is ensured in the eastern and western parts of the biosphere reserve.

484. However, the zonation map provided does not clearly depict all three types of biosphere reserve zones, and no current management plan for the biosphere reserve has been submitted. The other requests have not been met.

485. The Advisory Committee therefore concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Committee called on the national authorities to submit the information requested at the 31st meeting of the IACBR in 2025 to the MAB Secretariat by (items a, b, c and e) by **30 September 2026** and to submit a management plan (item d) by **30 September 2027**.

486. **Kavir Biosphere Reserve (Iran).** The Advisory Committee took note that the additional information regarding (i) the current management plan of the entire biosphere reserve; (ii) a vegetation map or land cover map showing the principal habitats and land cover types; and (iii) information as to how the core area, which is not surrounded by a buffer zone in the northern, eastern and southern parts, will be protected, has not yet been submitted by the national authorities to the MAB Secretariat.

487. In view of this, the Advisory Committee concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Committee called on the national authorities to submit the information requested at the 31st meeting of the IACBR in 2025 to the MAB Secretariat by **30 September 2026**.

488. **Miankaleh Biosphere Reserve (Iran).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the information submitted by the authorities including a current management plan, incorporating an explanation as to how the document serves the entire biosphere reserve. After reviewing the information, the Advisory Committee concluded that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

489. **Touran Biosphere Reserve (Iran).** The Advisory Committee noted that the authorities have not yet submitted the additional information requested at the MAB-ICC's 37th session in 2025, notably: (i) the current management plan of the entire biosphere reserve; (ii) a vegetation map or land cover map showing the principal habitats and land cover types; and (iii) an explanation as to how adequate protection will be ensured for the core area, which is not surrounded by a buffer zone in the eastern part of the biosphere reserve.

490. In view of this, the Advisory Committee concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Committee called on the national authorities to provide the necessary documentation, undertake appropriate follow-up action and submit the information requested by the Advisory Committee to the MAB Secretariat by **30 September 2026**.

491. **Urmia Biosphere Reserve (Iran).** The Advisory Committee acknowledged receipt of a copy of the current Management Plan of the biosphere reserve, accompanied by an explanation as to how the document serves the entire biosphere reserve in accordance with the requirements of the Statutory Framework. However, the Committee noted that the document with the electronic file name 'URM Lake Management Plan' is not an officially approved plan and does not cover all three zones and functions of the biosphere reserve.

492. Therefore, the Committee concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Committee called on the national authorities to submit the information requested at the 31st meeting of the IACBR in 2025 to the MAB Secretariat, including an outline of the biosphere reserve management plan, by **15 May 2026**, and a full management plan by **30 September 2027**).

493. **Somma, Vesuvio and Miglio d'Oro Biosphere Reserve (Italy).** The Advisory Committee acknowledged the information submitted by the authorities in response to the request for a current management plan, an explanation as to how increased tourism is being managed, clarification regarding the extent of coordination with

neighbouring sites, and measures being taken to address illegal waste dumping.

494. The Advisory Committee noted the details of the site's management structure, the Institutional Board for the Participatory Management of the Biosphere Reserve. It also noted with satisfaction the development of a Biosphere Reserve Youth Forum.

495. Regarding the governance structure, the biosphere reserve has no specific legal status. It relies entirely on existing authorities with overlapping mandates. By decision of the Institutional Board, the Vesuvius National Park Authority represents the biosphere reserve and coordinates the Institutional Board.

496. While a management plan and communication plan are being drafted, no formally adopted and consolidated management plan covering the entire biosphere reserve has been submitted.

497. The Committee appreciated the efforts made to redistribute tourism to parts of the reserve beyond the core area. Tourism management measures describe visitor camps, online booking, shuttle services. The Committee also appreciated efforts to build knowledge and awareness through twinning, and a Memorandum of Understanding with the Permanent Observatory for the Naples World Heritage Site and the Italian Institute for Environmental Policy Studies.

498. While the Advisory Committee applauded the collaboration with research and education partners, it requested documentation and references to provide further information on tourism carrying capacity and managing tourism volumes as well as other research topics.

499. The Advisory Committee noted that the biosphere reserve does not have dedicated financial resources beyond project-based funding. It encouraged the Institutional Board to ensure dedicated funding with a clear fundraising strategy shared by all institutional board members.

500. While the Advisory Committee commended the establishment of the MAB Youth Committee and the initial work done to draft the management and communication plan, it expressed concern at the lack of such a plan. The Advisory Committee therefore concluded that the biosphere reserve **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requested the authorities to provide the following information by **30 September 2026**:

a. A workplan and draft outline of the biosphere reserve management and communication plan.

b. Further clarification of the roles and commitments of the members of the Institutional Board, with their endorsement letters.

c. Further details of visitor carrying capacity and sustainable economic development research and action, including documentation, agreements or links to published reports or decisions.

d. Further information about measures taken to address the dumping of illegal waste in the biosphere reserve and the National Park.

501. The Advisory Committee also requested the authorities to provide the following information by **30 September 2027**:

a. A completed management and communication plan, including details of stakeholder participation and consultation, a fundraising plan and a dedicated budget.

502. **El Cielo Biosphere Reserve (Mexico).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the additional information submitted by the national authorities. However, it noted a lack of documented results for the implementation of the 2013–2024 Management Plan, as well the absence of a concrete indicator matrix, and a fully operational monitoring and

evaluation framework.

503. The Committee also noted that despite a clarification regarding the zonation and governance, including the role of the Management Committee, the information provided by the authorities was insufficient to demonstrate the effective integration of the transition area in decision-making and management processes. It also took note of the absence of a buffer zone around Core Area 1, while acknowledging the intention to address this matter through a re-zoning proposal that is currently under preparation.

504. After reviewing the additional information, the Advisory Committee concluded that the site **does not meet** the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requested the national authorities to submit the consolidated management plan for the whole biosphere reserve, aligned with the newly proposed zonation, to the MAB Secretariat by **30 September 2026.**

505. **Islas Marías Biosphere Reserve (Mexico).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the additional information submitted by the national authorities and took note of the explanations offered regarding zonation, legal status and the role of CONANP, as well as the formal establishment of the Biosphere Reserve Advisory Council. However, the Committee considered the information insufficient. In particular, the inclusion of mainland coastal communities within the zonation is still under consideration, and further evidence is required to demonstrate effective local participation, the operationalization of the sustainable development function and the integrative role of the management body beyond national protected area regulations.

506. After reviewing the additional information, the Advisory Committee concluded that the site still **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and requested the national authorities to submit the following to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026:**

a. Concrete evidence of effective mechanisms for the inclusion and active participation of mainland coastal communities in the governance, planning and implementation of the (MAB) biosphere reserve, including of their representation within the management body and the socio-economic benefits derived from biosphere reserve designation.

b. Formal clarification and supporting documentation demonstrating the full integration of the transition area in the Management Plan of the (MAB) biosphere reserve.

507. **Islas Marietas Biosphere Reserve (Mexico).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the additional information submitted by the national authorities. Based on this information, the Committee noted that no resident population exists within the Islas Marietas (MAB) Biosphere Reserve.

508. The islands are uninhabited and do not contain permanent settlements or housing infrastructure. Under Mexican national legislation, the legally designated protected area (national biosphere reserve) does not include a formally established transition area and does not encompass any resident population within its officially recognized boundaries.

509. The authorities clarified that nearby coastal communities maintain direct functional and economic interactions with the biosphere reserve, especially through tourism-related activities, and are therefore considered in relation to the site. However, these communities are not formally included within the legal boundaries of the biosphere reserve under Mexican law.

510. In this context, while these communities may be functionally associated with the site, the absence of a recognized transition area integrated within the biosphere reserve raises questions regarding full alignment with the zoning requirements of the MAB framework, which mandate the inclusion of a transition area as an integral part of the territory, encompassing a resident population within its boundaries.

511. The submitted documentation indicates that conservation, regulated tourism, environmental education and scientific monitoring activities are being implemented, and that the absence of a resident population does not in itself preclude compliance with the Statutory Framework. However, the Management Plan in force dates from 2011 and has not been revised, which weakens the demonstration of adaptive management and strategic planning. Overall, the information provided focuses primarily on the administration of the protected area (national biosphere reserve) rather than on the (MAB) biosphere reserve as an integrated territorial framework effectively fulfilling the three MAB functions.

512. After reviewing the additional information provided, the Advisory Committee concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. It therefore requests the authorities to submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**:

a. The final version of the Management Plan.

b. Formal clarification and supporting documentation demonstrating the full integration of the transition area of the biosphere reserve within the Biosphere Reserve Management Programme.

c. Clarification as to whether a resident population is present within the biosphere reserve and, if so, provide (i) a map of the biosphere reserve clearly indicating villages and/or human settlements; and (ii) a detailed description of the participation and engagement of local communities in governance, decision-making and implementation processes.

513. **Los Volcanes Biosphere Reserve (Mexico).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the additional information submitted by the national authorities and acknowledged the explanations regarding the 65 per cent reduction in surface area, the harmonization of zonation, the justification for the absence of a buffer zone in the southern sector due to volcanic risk, and the functioning of the management authority and Biosphere Reserve Advisory Council.

514. However, the Committee observed that the substantial reduction in surface area fundamentally alters the territorial scope of the biosphere reserve, and noted that the documentation does not sufficiently demonstrate the integrated operationalization of the three MAB functions under the new configuration. The management framework remains based primarily on the 2013 Management Programme of the Iztaccíhuatl Popocatépetl National Park, and the subsequent harmonization exercise does not replace the need for a dedicated biosphere reserve management plan. The Committee further noted that the governance structure remains centred on the national park, with no distinct management body ensuring integrated implementation of the biosphere reserve functions at the broader territorial level.

515. In consideration of the above, the Advisory Committee concludes that the Los Volcanes Biosphere Reserve still **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requests the national authorities to submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**:

a. Formal clarification and supporting documentation demonstrating the full integration of the transition area into the Management Programme of the biosphere reserve.

b. Concrete evidence illustrating how the Biosphere Reserve Advisory Council and other stakeholders contribute effectively to decision-making processes, and how their recommendations are reflected in management actions and programme revisions.

516. **Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve (Mexico).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the complementary information submitted by the national authorities and acknowledged the evidence of sustained interventions in the transition area, as well as the active functioning of the Biosphere Reserve Advisory Council. However, the Committee

considered that further clarification is required to demonstrate the full integration of the transition area into the Management Plan and to provide concrete evidence of how the Biosphere Reserve Advisory Council's deliberations effectively influence management decisions and programme revisions.

517. The Advisory Committee therefore concluded that the biosphere reserve still **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requests the national authorities to submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026:**

a. Formal clarification and supporting documentation demonstrating the full integration of the transition area into the Management Programme of the biosphere reserve.

b. Concrete evidence illustrating how the Advisory Council and other stakeholders contribute effectively to decision-making processes and how their recommendations are reflected in management actions and programme revisions.

518. **Naha-Metzabok Biosphere Reserve (Mexico).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the complementary information submitted by the national authorities, including the revised zonation scheme and updated management plan, as well as clarifications on governance arrangements and the functioning of the Biosphere Reserve Advisory Council.

519. However, while progress has been made, the Committee noted that the underlying issue persists regarding the interpretation of a UNESCO-MAB biosphere reserve as compared with the national biosphere reserve category, particularly concerning the definition and functional integration of the transition area.

520. After reviewing the additional information, the Advisory Committee concluded that the biosphere reserve still **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Committee requested the national authorities to submit to the MAB Secretariat formal clarification and supporting documentation demonstrating the full integration of the transition area into the Management Programme of the (MAB) biosphere reserve by **15 May 2026.**

521. **Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve (Mexico).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the additional information submitted by the national authorities. After reviewing the information provided, the Advisory Committee concluded that the biosphere reserve still **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. While the proposal outlined reflects efforts to strengthen the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, structural adjustments remain necessary to ensure full compliance with the Statutory Framework, particularly with regard to governance, regulatory oversight and the effective participation of stakeholders. The Committee therefore requested the national authorities to submit to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026:**

a. Clear documentation identifying the extractive activities that are authorized and supervised within the biosphere reserve, together with evidence demonstrating compliance with applicable environmental regulations, for consideration by the ICC.

b. An updated map showing the location of extractive activities in relation to the biosphere reserve zonation.

c. Detailed information on the development and implementation of a robust monitoring system for mining operations, including measures to address illegal mining activities and to mitigate associated environmental impacts, in line with previous ICC recommendations.

d. Comprehensive information on the promotion and operationalization of territorial planning mechanisms, including intergovernmental agreements, demonstrating how

land use conflicts are addressed and how collaboration across different administrative and socio-economic contexts is ensured in an equitable and effective manner.

e. A formal clarification and supporting documentation demonstrating the full integration of the transition area into the Management Programme of the biosphere reserve, both legally and in terms of planning.

522. **Sierra La Laguna Biosphere Reserve (Mexico).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the complementary information submitted by the national authorities, including the revised map indicating human settlements and clarification regarding governance and ongoing activities. However, it noted that no formally designated transition area, consistent with the MAB criteria, is currently established and that the site continues to operate under the national protected area management plan, which is under revision.

523. After reviewing the additional information, the Advisory Committee concluded that the biosphere reserve still **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, particularly due to the absence of a formally designated transition area and the lack of an updated management plan fully aligned with the MAB Biosphere Reserve framework. The Committee therefore requested the national authorities to submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**:

a. A formally approved zonation scheme clearly identifying the transition area in accordance with the MAB criteria.

b. An updated management plan aligned with the three-zone structure of the biosphere reserve and the functions defined under the Statutory Framework.

524. **El Chaco Biosphere Reserve (Paraguay).** The Advisory Committee acknowledged the official communication from the national authorities confirming their intention to maintain the biosphere reserve while undertaking a comprehensive revision of its boundaries, zonation, structure and governance arrangements. It took note that a new nomination form reflecting these adjustments is expected in September 2026 and that support has been offered by the MAB Programme during this process.

525. Considering the absence of updated documentation within the current review cycle, the Advisory Committee concluded that the biosphere reserve **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves at this stage.

526. **Babia Biosphere Reserve (Spain).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the additional information submitted by the national authorities and took note that the Babia Biosphere Reserve has presented a work plan for the development of the 2026–2031 Strategic Plan and the Draft Strategic Plan 2026–2031, dated 30 September 2025. After reviewing the additional information, the Advisory Committee concluded that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

527. **La Mancha Húmeda Biosphere Reserve (Spain).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the additional information provided by the national authorities, indicating that both the review of the zoning and the Management Plan remain under preparation. In a note, the authorities further informed the Committee that initiatives are underway to address the requests formulated by the ICC. In addition, the process for selection of the members of the participation body and the scientific council has been carried out.

528. The Advisory Committee concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. Consequently, the Committee requested the authorities to prepare a formal confirmation of approval of the review of the proposal for modification of the zoning of the RBMH, including an assessment of the level of compliance and proposals for improvement, together with the duly approved Management Plan, to be submitted to the MAB Secretariat by **15**

May 2026.

529. **Las Ubiñas-La Mesa Biosphere Reserve (Spain).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the additional information submitted by the national authorities, including the revised zonation map and the management plan. However, it noted that the zonation is still pending formal approval and that the rules of procedure for the management committee, established in July 2025, have not yet been formally adopted.

530. The Advisory Committee concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. Consequently, the Committee requested the national authorities to prepare a formally approved zonation map and official documentation, confirming the establishment and operationalization of the management committee and its regulation, to be submitted to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**.

531. **Muniellos Biosphere Reserve (Spain**). The Advisory Committee welcomed the additional information provided by the national authorities. The periodic review report identified shortcomings in the current Management Plan, which has been in force since the end of 2024. Consequently, a decision has been taken to prepare a new Management Plan incorporating the recommendations. A draft version is attached as an annex to the report. However, the plan is subject to approval by the Social Participation Forum at its forthcoming meeting and has therefore not yet been formally adopted.

532. The composition of the Social Participation Forum of the Muniellos Biosphere Reserve, established by Decree 67/2013, aligns with that of the Natural Park Board. The Board's composition and appointment procedures are defined in Decree 44/2017, amending Decree 82/2004, which specifies the number of representatives and the structure of the Governing Commission of the Fuentes del Narcea, Degaña and Ibias Natural Park.

533. The response indicates that the requirements have not yet been fulfilled, as the Management Plan can only be implemented once it is approved by the participatory council. Furthermore, it remains unclear which board – the National Park Board or the Biosphere Reserve Board – is responsible. The Advisory Committee concluded that the site **does not meet** the criteria set by the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The Advisory Committee therefore requested the authorities to clarify which board is formally responsible for the approval of the Management Plan and to confirm that the Plan will be adopted by the Biosphere Reserve Board in accordance with the governance framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and to submit this information to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**.

534. **Valle de Laciana Biosphere Reserve (Spain).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the additional information submitted by the national authorities, which provides details of the implementation of a management plan, the constitution of a participatory council, and the establishment of an adequate management structure, involving the mobilization of the local population, all aligned with the criteria of the Statutory Framework. The Advisory Committee concluded that the site **meets** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

ITEM 10: WITHDRAWALS

535. **Mount Carmel Biosphere Reserve (Israel).** With an official letter, Israel announced its decision to voluntarily remove the Mount Carmel Biosphere Reserve from the list of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and requested to officially inform the MAB-ICC of the withdrawal at its next session.

ANNEX 4

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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

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

Thirty-eighth session
ITAIPU Biosphere Reserve, Hernandarias, Paraguay

3 to 6 June 2026

ITEM XV OF PROVISIONAL AGENDA: Examination of new biosphere reserves nominations and proposals for extension/modification/renaming to designated biosphere reserves that are part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves

1. Nominations for new biosphere reserves and proposals for extensions/modifications/renaming to biosphere reserves that are already part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) were considered at the 32nd meeting of the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves (IACBR), which met in presentia from 9 to 13 February 2026.

2. The Advisory Committee examined **seventeen (17)** proposals for new biosphere reserves, **and five (5) requests for an extension/modification** of an existing biosphere reserve. In addition, three (3) requests for the renaming of existing biosphere reserves were examined under Item 9, as they were submitted as part of the periodic review reporting process and are eligible to be treated under this item.

3. The Advisory Committee formulated their recommendations regarding specific sites in line with the recommendation categories as follows:

   - ***Proposals for new biosphere reserves or extensions/modifications/renaming to existing biosphere reserves <u>recommended for approval</u>:*** *the proposed site is recommended for approval as a biosphere reserve; no additional information is needed. For existing sites, the proposed changes are recommended for approval.*

   - ***Proposals for new biosphere reserves or extensions/modification/renaming to existing biosphere reserves <u>recommended for approval pending the submission of specific information</u>****: the proposed site is recommended for approval as a biosphere reserve or the proposed changes for existing sites are recommended for approval subject to receiving the specific information requested by the Advisory Committee. If the information is received by the MAB Secretariat by 15 May 2026, it will be considered by the MAB-ICC at its 38th session, to be held from 3 to 6 June 2026 in Hernandarias, Paraguay, and the Council may approve the inclusion of the site in the WNBR. If submitted by 30 September 2026, the information will be assessed by the MAB-ICC at its 39th session in 2027.*

   - ***Proposals for new biosphere reserves or extensions/modifications/renaming to existing biosphere reserves <u>recommended for deferral</u>*****:** the proposed site is recommended for deferral or the proposed changes for existing biosphere reserves are recommended for deferral as they **do not meet** the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and/or major clarifications with regard to application of the Statutory Framework to the proposed area are requested by the Advisory Committee. The relevant national authorities are therefore invited to revise the nomination and/or provide the requested clarifications for submission to the MAB Secretariat at their earliest convenience.

4. The Bureau of the MAB ICC will consider the recommendations of the IACBR below as well as the additional information received by the MAB Secretariat particularly with regard to nominations recommended for approval subject to receiving additional information by 15 May 2026. The Bureau will recommend for the consideration of the MAB ICC final decisions on all sites included in this document.

5. The MAB ICC is invited to decide on the new sites for inclusion in the WNBR and extensions/modifications and/or renaming of biosphere reserves already included in the WNBR that could be approved.

New nominations recommended for approval:

6. **Great Caucasus (Azerbaijan)**. The proposed Great Caucasus Biosphere Reserve is located on the southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus mountain range in north-western Azerbaijan, within the administrative territories of the Balakan and Zagatala districts. The site borders protected areas in Georgia and the Russian Federation, and is therefore of high relevance for ecological connectivity at regional and transboundary scales.

7. The proposed area has a broad altitudinal gradient ranging from 245 m to 3,648 m, and includes river valleys, broad-leaved forests, subalpine and alpine meadows, and nival zones. The core area is centred on the long-established Zagatala State Nature Reserve, complemented by state sanctuaries, state forests and community lands, which function as buffer and transition areas.

8. The region supports a culturally diverse human population whose main livelihoods include agriculture (notably, hazelnut cultivation), pastoralism (including transhumance), beekeeping, forestry-related activities and emerging nature-based tourism. The nomination emphasizes the integration of traditional land-use practices with biodiversity conservation and sustainable development objectives.

9. The proposed biosphere reserve encompasses a mosaic of ecosystems representative of a major biogeographic region, with a clear gradation from strictly protected core areas to human-dominated transition areas. The site is of outstanding importance for biodiversity conservation within the Caucasus Ecoregion, due to its wide range of endemic, rare and threatened species and largely intact ecosystems. The long history of strict protection in the core area provides a solid foundation for the convincing vision presented in the nomination of socio-economically and culturally sustainable development based on traditional livelihoods, sustainable agriculture and eco-tourism. The alignment of this approach with national development strategies is well documented.

10. The Advisory Committee noted that the proposal demonstrates strong potential for research, monitoring, education and training, building on existing scientific work in the Zagatala State Nature Reserve and partnerships with universities and research institutions. The proposed biosphere reserve is of sufficient size to support ecological processes, viable populations of wide-ranging species and meaningful sustainable development activities. The presence of a large, strictly protected core area strengthens the nomination, and the proposed zonation follows biosphere reserve requirements.

11. The Advisory Committee appreciated that the nomination dossier outlines an emerging governance and coordination framework involving national authorities, local administrations and stakeholders. An outline for a management framework and strategic vision are provided. The contribution of the site to the World Network of Biosphere Reserves is clearly articulated.

12. The Advisory Committee considered that the Great Caucasus Biosphere Reserve nomination document demonstrates high ecological value, strong relevance to the objectives of the MAB Programme and significant potential contribution to the World

Network of Biosphere Reserves, and recommends that the proposed site be **approved**.

13. However, the Advisory Committee recommended that the biosphere reserve's governance structure, including roles and decision-making mechanisms, should be finalized to ensure inclusive and effective governance. This should include enhancing the legal protection of state sanctuaries and coordinating and monitoring activities related to sustainable development in the transition area. It also recommends that the proposed operational budget be increased to a level consistent with the size and ambition of the biosphere reserve and in line with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan, and asked that the sources of funding be revised and clarified. The Advisory Committee requested the authorities to provide an update on these two issues to the Secretariat by 30 September 2027.

14. **Dalankuh-Qamishlou (Iran).** The proposed Dalankuh-Qamishlou Biosphere Reserve is located at the intersection of the Central Zagros and the Iranian Central Plateau. The site encompasses diverse landscapes including high mountains, intermontane plains, piedmont aprons and semi-arid steppe. It supports a rich diversity of vertebrates and invertebrates, including apex predators, large ungulates, raptors, steppe birds, herpetofauna, amphibians and key pollinators.

15. The total area of the proposed biosphere reserve is 874,515 ha. The core area (45,096 ha) has three components: (i) the entire Qamishlou National Park, together with contiguous, highly sensitive patches within the Qamishlou Wildlife Refuge; (ii) the high ridges and cliffs of the Dalankuh Protected Area; and (iii) the Shahankuh Highlands. The buffer zone (395,495 ha) encompasses state rangelands and forests as well as selected municipal and rural districts contiguous to the cores. The transition areas (433,924 ha) consist of a mix of private farmland and orchards, communal pastures, villages and towns, industrial and service parcels, and cultural heritage sites.

16. The proposed Dalankuh-Qamishlou Biosphere Reserve offers significant opportunities to support sustainable economic and human development in ways that align with cultural traditions and ecological health. The seasonal migration practised by Bakhtiari pastoralists, Georgian communities and those involved in rainfed and irrigated agriculture in Feridan and nearby valleys, is representative of traditional land-use systems that have proven resilient over centuries. These practices help maintain vegetation cover, support soil and water conservation, and protect habitats while also ensuring food security and bolstering local economies.

17. The Advisory Committee noted that an integrated management and cooperation framework has been established for the entire site, with a management and cooperation plan being prepared through a multi-level participatory process. The Advisory Committee appreciated the decision to engage a range of local and national stakeholders in consultations as part of the preparation process of the national nomination dossier, and recommended that the proposed site be **approved**. The Advisory Committee requested the authorities to finalize the full management plan for the site through a consultative process by **30 September 2028**.

18. **Nino Konis Santana (Timor-Leste).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the first biosphere reserve nomination from Timor-Leste. The proposed Nino Konis Santana Biosphere Reserve is located at the easternmost part of Timor Island (Municipality of Lautem) in Timor-Leste. It encompasses interconnected terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems, including tropical evergreen forest, deciduous forest, swamp forest, tropical lowland forest, mountain forest, coastal forest and mangrove, with high numbers of flowering plants, medicinal plants, birds and mammals, among others. It forms part of the Wallacean region, a biodiversity hotspot, and the Coral Triangle Zone, which possesses the greatest biodiversity of coral reefs and fish in the world.

19. The total area of the proposed biosphere reserve is 295,939 ha. The boundaries of the core area match those of the Nino Konis Santana National Park (131,297 ha), which consists of two terrestrial areas totalling 72,609 ha and a marine area of 58,688 ha, including six marine protected areas and one dugong protection site. The

buffer zone covers an area of 58,535 ha (terrestrial 16,105 ha, marine 42,430 ha), while the transition area is purely terrestrial with an area of 106,107 ha. The marine core area and buffer zone have been defined based on marine biodiversity research carried out by the Coral Triangle Initiative along the national park coastline and the managed marine area.

20. Fishing is the most important livelihood in seashore villages within the proposed biosphere reserve. Communities employ a variety of fishing practices, including traditional methods that use fishhooks and simple casting nets. While no major tourism facilities are being developed in the area, a biosphere reserve designation is expected to contribute to opportunities for sustainable natural and cultural tourism development and economic returns to local communities.

21. The Advisory Committee noted the development of an Integrated Management Plan 2026–2030 for the entire proposed Nino Konis Santana Biosphere Reserve, and appreciated the considerable efforts undertaken by the nominating authority to engage a range of local and national stakeholders in consultations and the preparation of the nomination dossier, acknowledging the lengthy period of time involved.

22. The Advisory Committee commended the authorities on the high quality of the nomination document, and recommended that the proposed site be **approved**. The Advisory Committee further recommended that the responsible authorities strengthen policies and actions to monitor regularly the coral ecosystems, including marine species that rely on these ecosystems, and work to prevent negative impacts from climate change and tourism development in cooperation with relevant local enterprises and communities.

23. **Phong Nha – Ke Bang (Viet Nam).** The proposed Phong Nha – Ke Bang Biosphere Reserve is a vast area in Quang Tri province, Central Viet Nam, located in a tropical monsoon climate zone with two distinct dry and rainy seasons. It has one of the highest levels of biodiversity in Viet Nam, with pristine tropical rainforest ecosystems in limestone mountain areas inhabited by numerous endemic species. The proposed biosphere reserve is also an important site for scientific research in ecology, conservation and forestry. The site's forest resources are of significant socio-economic value, and contribute to the livelihood stability of the local population.

24. The proposed biosphere reserve has an estimated human population of 159,325, with a mixed distribution of ethnic groups, including the Kinh, Chut and Bru-Van Kieu. The Chut and Bru-Van Kieu are ethnic minority groups that live mainly in forested areas of the proposed biosphere reserve and maintain close relationships with nature, relying on the forests for hunting, gathering and slash-and-burn farming.

25. The Advisory Committee noted that Phong Nha – Ke Bang National Park was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2003 under criterion (viii) and was extended in 2015 under criteria (ix) and (x). In 2025, the park became the first transboundary World Heritage site in Southeast Asia, through an agreement with the neighbouring Hin Nam No National Park in Lao PDR.

26. The proposed biosphere reserve covers a total area of 515,830 ha, located in 15 communes of Quang Tri Province. The proposed core area (123,326 ha) and buffer zone (220,055 ha) encompass the entire core area and buffer zone of Phong Nha – Ke Bang National Park. The two transition areas (172,449 ha) are the site of agricultural, forestry and tourism activities.

27. In terms of economic development, the primary sources of traditional livelihoods in local communities are agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Since the National Park's inscription on the World Heritage List, ecotourism and community-based tourism, among other tourism services, have emerged as a key economic driver and have generated stable incomes for local communities, particularly ethnic minorities. A draft Management and Environmental Protection Plan for the entirety of the proposed Phong Nha – Ke Bang Biosphere Reserve (2025–2030) has been developed and a Management Board will be established following designation.

28. The Advisory Committee appreciated the detailed information on ecological and cultural values provided in the nomination dossier, including on Indigenous Peoples and local communities, as well as the potential for sustainable development of the proposed Phong Nha – Ke Bang Biosphere Reserve, and concluded that the proposed site be **approved**. The Advisory Committee further recommended that the Management Plan integrate actions to harmonize management of the biosphere reserve and the World Heritage site as a Multi-Internationally Designated Area (MIDA), for mutual benefit.

New nominations recommended for approval pending the submission of specific information:

29. **Shkodër Lake Biosphere Reserve (Albania).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the proposal for the Shkodër Lake Biosphere Reserve. The Shkodër Lake Basin is the largest freshwater ecosystem in the Balkans and plays an ecologically and culturally significant role in Albania and southeastern Europe. The proposed site spans a mosaic of habitats from the Adriatic coast and Velipoja lowlands to the Albanian Alps, ranging over 2,000 m in elevation. At its core lies Shkodër Lake, a Ramsar site. Strong links between nature and culture are reflected in traditional livelihoods such as fishing, agriculture and craftsmanship.

30. Buffer zones in the proposed reserve support farming, ecotourism, forestry, organic agriculture, beekeeping and medicinal plant collection. The region hosts at least 200 plant taxa recognized as genetic resources for food and agriculture. Proposed work on wild relatives of crop species and medicinal and aromatic plants seeks to strengthen the link between biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture and agrotourism.

31. In addition to archaeological heritage, the region is renowned for its intangible cultural heritage, including Xhubleta, inscribed by UNESCO on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. The site covers 142,578 ha site including core areas (2 per cent), buffer zones (69 per cent) and transition areas (29 per cent). The human population numbers 122,431, the majority of whom live in the transition areas.

32. Sustainable development objectives for the biosphere reserve include: strengthening institutional and community cooperation, advancing sustainable tourism planning, improving rural livelihoods through green and traditional economies (silvopastoralism, fisheries, agriculture, renewable energy and rural infrastructure), reinforcing agricultural services and traditional knowledge, and enhancing skills and employment to reduce unsustainable practices.

33. The Advisory Committee noted the strong bottom-up, participatory process underlying the proposal, and recognized that the planned monitoring and evaluation framework will play a key role in measuring progress.

34. Despite the proposal's strengths, a few concerns were raised. Shkodër Lake, which is central to the functioning of the reserve, lies at the geographical edge of the site. Effective implementation depends in part on Montenegro's proposed biosphere reserve, ideally through a future transboundary designation.

35. As indicated in the submitted maps, the inversion of buffer and transition zonation is unusual. The justification – based on strong ecological and social arguments and community requests – will need to be demonstrated through effective implementation.

36. A number of key urban centres are located in the transition areas. Accordingly, waste management, untreated sewage entering the lake and increasing tourism pose major challenges to the biosphere reserve. A comprehensive tourism strategy is urgently needed, alongside improved transboundary fisheries management with Montenegro.

37. As the designated core area accounts for only 2 per cent of the proposed biosphere reserve, the Advisory Committee strongly encourages the expansion of core areas to strengthen biodiversity conservation. It also recommended exploring the possibility of expanding the biosphere reserve, including through the inclusion of the Albanian Alps

National Park.

38. Ongoing extractive activities such as gravel mining and other pollution sources in transition areas require careful monitoring and management. Accordingly, the proposal for a solid waste management plan should be actively pursued.

39. The submitted management outline appears to be designed for a transboundary site. While this perspective is appreciated, a dedicated management plan for the Albanian biosphere reserve is needed, which incorporates but is not dependent on transboundary cooperation. Future management and action plans should align with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan.

40. Continued efforts toward transboundary collaboration with Montenegro – particularly on water pollution, waste management and fisheries – are strongly recommended given the shared importance of the lake.

41. The Advisory Committee appreciated the participatory process underlying the development of this biosphere reserve and recommended that the site be **approved pending** receipt of the following information by **15 May 2026**:

    a. An outline for the Albanian Shkodër Lake Biosphere Reserve Management Plan.

    b. Any risk assessments or environmental impact assessments carried out on major extractive or polluting industries in the transition area, as well as plans to monitor and mitigate the associated risks.

    c. An updated map with labels indicating the main municipalities.

42. **Theniet El Had (Algeria).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the re-submitted proposal from Algeria. The proposed site is located 173 km from Algiers, situated in the Ouarsenis mountain range, and occupies a forested area on the slopes of Jebel El Meddad (Cedar Mountain).

43. The proposed site covers 20,000 ha, including a core area of 3,846 ha (the Theniet El Had National Park, established in 1983), a buffer zone of 1,978 ha and a transition area of 14,176 ha. The core area contains one of the most beautiful cedar groves in Algeria and the only natural cedar forest in Western Algeria.

44. The proposed site encompasses a variety of ecosystems with high species richness, including cedar groves, oak forests, pine forests, high-altitude grasslands, ponds and cliffs. It hosts 611 plant species, of which 37 are endemic, for example the Messinian fritillary (*Fritillaria oranensis).* The site is also home to rare and protected mammal species, such as the caracal (*Caracal caracal),* striped hyena (*Hyaena hyaena*) and North African elephant shrew (*Elephantulus rozeti*), as well as birds, including the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and booted eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*).

45. The proposed site is inhabited by 6,990 people, all living in the transition area, mostly from Amazigh communities. The populations are organized into small communities and hamlets (Douars and Mechtas), and have cultivated a strong sense of belonging to their territory, preserving their traditions while adapting to contemporary economic dynamics. Sheep and goat pastoralism is the main activity in the area, alongside subsistence agriculture.

46. No management plan was included with the submission, although the authorities provided an outline of the document. The proposed site will be managed by the Theniet El Had National Park, a public administrative institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries, and under the technical supervision of the General Directorate of Forests. In addition, an organizational framework including local actors, government authorities, associations and researchers is proposed alongside the park management structure.

47. Although the proposed zoning is appropriate for implementation of the three functions of a biosphere reserve, the permanent wetland formed by the Mghila Dam, located in the southern part of the proposed site (422 ha), lacks legal protection despite its rich biodiversity. This area should not be considered a core area but rather a buffer zone.

48. The Advisory Committee recommended that the site be **approved pending** receipt of the following information by **15 May 2026**:

    a. Clarification and justification for the presence of a small core area surrounded by a transition area at the northern tip of the proposed site.

    b. An explanation of how the integrity of the proposed core area bordering the site in its northern section can be maintained without negative impacts from neighbouring areas (e.g. protected areas designated in these areas).

    c. Reclassification of the proposed 422-ha core area in the southern part as a buffer zone. Since this wetland area may be vulnerable, the Advisory Committee encouraged the authorities to seek appropriate legal protection and consider requesting a change in core area zonation in the future.

    d. Submission of a shapefile reflecting these changes and clarifications, following the guidelines established by the MAB Secretariat: a single shapefile with core areas, buffer zones and transition areas as polygons, with no overlaps or gaps.

    e. An explanation of the role of local communities in the management of the proposed biosphere reserve.

    f. Submission of a bibliography and letters of endorsement for the proposed site.

49. Additionally, the Advisory Committee recommended that the authorities modify the nomination form to reflect all changes in zonation and include all sections requested by the Secretariat.

50. The Advisory Committee encouraged the legal authorities to prepare a consultative management plan encompassing the whole of the biosphere reserve following approval, and to strengthen partnerships, collaboration and the involvement of all stakeholders in governance of the reserve.

51. **Aruba Island (Aruba).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the proposal for designation of Aruba's first biosphere reserve, which encompasses the entire island covering 19,300 ha and incorporating an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of approximately 2,996,321 ha. The Committee congratulated the authorities on the initiative and considered the establishment of the proposed biosphere reserve to be of high importance, noting the strong commitment demonstrated by the country to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

52. The Committee observed that Aruba already has a significant number of legally designated protected areas, as well as national planning and policy instruments, including territorial planning, biodiversity and reforestation strategies, which address the relationship between people and nature in an integrated manner. These instruments present strong parallels with the objectives and principles of the MAB Programme and provide a solid foundation for the effective implementation of an island-wide biosphere reserve.

53. The Advisory Committee noted, however, the need for further clarification regarding the proposed zoning system to ensure full compliance with the Statutory Framework. In particular, clearer identification, configuration and cartographic representation of the core, buffer and transition areas is necessary, as the maps provided do not yet fully reflect the MAB zoning categories. Moreover, the separate maps for the EEZ and for terrestrial and coastal areas do not clearly show that the remaining portions of the EEZ are included within the proposed biosphere reserve and designated as a marine transition area.

54. The Advisory Committee also noted that while the nomination dossier states that buffer zones surround and connect core areas to mitigate external pressures, this function is not sufficiently demonstrated in either the maps or the accompanying narrative. Similarly, clarification is required concerning the extent of the transition area, which is described as encompassing most of the island's inhabited, agricultural, industrial and tourism areas, as well as coastal waters.

55. In addition, the Advisory Committee noted that the information provided on stakeholder engagement remains limited and refers primarily to a training activity that took place in August 2025. Given the scope of an island-wide biosphere reserve nomination, the Committee considered necessary evidence of a broader, more continuous and well-documented participatory process. While the nomination indicates that the process was coordinated by the National Commission for UNESCO Aruba, with support from the UNESCO Caribbean Office, and that more than a dozen meetings were held between 2022 and 2025, this information should be presented in a more structured and comprehensive manner.

56. Taking into account the information provided, the Advisory Committee recommended that the proposal be **approved pending** the submission of additional information and clarifications. The Advisory Committee requested the national authorities to submit the following information by **15 May 2026:**

    a. A clearer and more detailed description of the terrestrial and marine core areas, including current activities taking place within these areas, and the explicit identification and naming of all legally designated core areas.

    b. A revised and coherent zoning description and cartographic representation, including a single unified zoning map, clearly demonstrating how the buffer zones surround and protect core areas and clarifying the extent of the transition area, including whether and how marine areas within the EEZ are designated as marine transition areas, in full alignment with the zoning categories of the MAB Programme.

    c. A complete and updated set of maps, including land-use and vegetation maps, including coordinates, scale, north arrows and legends, as well as any missing shapefiles supporting these maps.

    d. Additional information on stakeholder engagement, including how communities, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, private sector actors, youth groups and other stakeholders were involved throughout the process, the number of meetings or consultations held, and any communication or outreach activities undertaken to inform and engage with the wider public.

    e. Integration of the objectives and actions of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan into the proposed integrated management framework of the biosphere reserve.

57. **Takamanda-Cross River Gorilla (Cameroon)** The Advisory Committee welcomed this proposal from the Republic of Cameroon. The proposed site is located along the Cameroon–Nigeria border within the Guinean Forests of West Africa. It encompasses interconnected ecosystems, including lowland tropical rainforest, submontane and montane forests, and isolated cloud forest patches, all of which contribute to its high ecological integrity.

58. The site supports approximately one-third of the global population of the critically endangered Cross River Gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla diehli),* the most threatened gorilla subspecies. It is also home to a number of other threatened species, including the Nigeria–Cameroon chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes ellioti*, endangered), drill (*Mandrillus leucophaeus,* endangered), forest elephant, Preuss's guenon (*Allochrocebus preussi,* endangered) and the yellow-backed duiker (*Cephalophus silvicultor,* near threatened), as well as range-restricted amphibians and birds. Over 950 plant species have been recorded in Takamanda National Park, including endemic and culturally important species such as *Cola takamandensis, Garcinia kola* and *Irvingia gabonensis*. The area is also recognized as an Important Bird Area.

59. The proposed biosphere reserve covers 309,103 ha, comprising a core area of 36,598 ha (11.8 per cent), a buffer zone of 122,649 ha (39.7 per cent) and a transition area of 149,856 ha (48.5 per cent). The core area includes the legally designated Core Conservation Zones of Takamanda National Park and Kagwene Gorilla Sanctuary, as well as part of the fragile ecological zone of Takamanda National Park. The buffer zone includes limited access zones, forest management units, community forests and

ecological corridors managed under Cluster Conservation and Development Agreements and local bylaws.

60. The proposed site is estimated to have 2,470 inhabitants in the core area and 23,000 in the transition area; however, population numbers in the buffer zone were not specified in the dossier. While a management plan exists for Takamanda National Park, there is currently no integrated management plan for the entire proposed biosphere reserve.

61. The Advisory Committee took note of the quality of the dossier and commended the authorities on their submission. The Committee appreciated the participatory process underpinning the nomination and concluded that the proposed site be **approved pending** submission of the following information to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026:**

    a. A management plan outline for the proposed biosphere reserve.
    b. Updated population figures for the entire biosphere reserve.

62. **Quebec City (Canada)** The Advisory Committee welcomed Canada's nomination of this biosphere reserve. The proposed site lies in southeastern Canada between the St. Lawrence River and the Laurentian Mountains, matching the administrative boundaries of the Québec City agglomeration. Its landscape features the Québec promontory with its forested rocky cliffs, terraces and plateaus of the St. Lawrence Lowlands, and the southern Laurentian hills. The region is influenced by tidal waters and a dense hydrographic network, and is surrounded by extensive agricultural and forested lands. Natural environments of conservation interest make up 45 per cent of the territory, including 34 legally protected sites. The area hosts 502 of Québec's 846 vertebrate species, including 63 at-risk species, as well as 21 plant species with special status. It also contains two exceptional forest ecosystems – the beech forest of Saint Augustin de Desmaures and the red oak forest of Cap Rouge. Located at the confluence of several Indigenous traditional territories, including the Nionwentsïo (Wendat), Nitassinan (Innu), and Ndakina (W8banaki), the site reflects significant cultural and ecological heritage.

63. The proposed biosphere reserve covers 56,620 ha: 2,830 ha of core areas (4.8 per cent), 19,437 ha of buffer zones (34.2 per cent), and 34,353 ha of transition areas (61 per cent). Its population of 635,377 lives in Québec City, L'Ancienne Lorette, Saint Augustin de Desmaures, and the Wendake Reserve. Residents work mainly in public services, creative industries, and traditional sectors such as agriculture, forestry, maritime trade, and tourism. The Advisory Committee acknowledged the potential for exploring the issues of urban biosphere reserves, as discussed, for example, in the deliberation of experts of the MAB Urban Group, submitted to the MAB-ICC in 2006.

64. The proposal for balanced implementation of the three functions, funding, staffing and partner participation was well received. However, some concerns were raised by the Advisory Committee in relation to the proposed zoning, specifically the status and capabilities of core areas located in the urban environment and provision of buffering functions in cases where formal buffer zones are absent.

65. The Advisory Committee welcomed the proposed BR Management Plan. However, it recommended its further elaboration related to several specific issues. It recommended strengthening the conservation function and placing emphasis on urban and peri-urban ecosystems – particularly wetlands and green spaces – with a focus on their protection, restoration, and integration into the biosphere reserve's sustainable development framework.

66. It also encouraged the potential future extension of the site outside the administrative borders to include more natural areas as well as the designation and implementation of innovative, biodiversity-enhancing practices such as green roofs, energy and water management policies, waste reduction, urban ecological restoration, tourism management, and urban sprawl monitoring and management.

67. The Committee advised further elaboration of a Biosphere Reserve Management Plan, using the appropriate section of the Technical Guidelines for Biosphere Reserves, other biosphere reserves' management plans as reference points, and relevant issues of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan for the UNESCO's MAB Programme and its World

Network of Biosphere Reserves (2026-2035).

68. In addition, the Committee commended the involvement of First Nations in the application and recommends their further engagement in managing the biosphere reserve.

69. The Advisory Committee welcomed this nomination proposal and recommended that the site **be approved pending** the submission of the following information by **15 May 2026:**
    a. Justification as to whether the protection status of proposed core areas listed in the Directory of Protected Natural Environments, which are based on the voluntary conservation initiatives, is sufficient to enable and support core area functions.
    b. More detailed explanation of how the core areas proposed in the urban areas fulfil the standards and functions of core areas or whether their classification as stand-alone buffer zones would be more appropriate, potentially leading to changes in the proposed zonation.
    c. More detailed information on how the buffering functions are provided where the core areas are not surrounded by formal buffer zones.

70. **Tost Toson Bumbiin Nuruu (Mongolia).** The proposed Tost Toson Bumbiin Nuruu Biosphere Reserve is situated in Mongolia's South Gobi region and plays a vital role in conserving both biological and cultural diversity at regional and global levels. Encompassing desert steppe and rugged, dry mountain terrains, this proposed biosphere reserve functions as a key wildlife corridor linking Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park with the Great Gobi 'A' Strictly Protected Area.

71. The proposed biosphere reserve is home to a variety of mountain and steppe ungulates, as well as carnivores, including snow leopards (*Panthera uncia*) and Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*). The mountains within the biosphere reserve play a crucial role in facilitating migration and ensuring genetic flow between snow leopard populations.

72. The proposed biosphere reserve covers 1,661,408 ha, including a core area of 36,288 ha, a buffer zone of 860,252 ha and a transition area of 764,868 ha. Four core areas were established in consultation with the local herder community. Animal husbandry is vital to the Mongolian economy, employment and export earnings, and functions as an important economic activity in the proposed biosphere reserve, which is home to 201 herder families. The main livestock species are goats and sheep, along with some horses, camels and a few cattle.

73. The Advisory Committee commended the authorities on the establishment of a Co-Management Committee and noted the existence of a finalized Management Plan for 2021–2025, covering mainly the core area and buffer zone. A separate management plan for the transition area (2023–2034) was approved by the same governing body in 2025. According to a 2025 policy issued by Mongolia's Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, protected area management plans now follow a 10-year cycle.

74. The Advisory Committee recommended that the site be **approved pending** the submission of the following information by **15 May 2026**:

    a. A detailed outline and timeline demonstrating how the current management plans for the core areas, buffer zone and transitional areas will be integrated into a common management framework.

    b. A justification for the proposed exclusion of parts of the transitional area to the east and north of the buffer zone.

75. The Advisory Committee further encouraged the authorities to make special efforts to ensure the long-term protection of the site's core areas.

76. **Skadar Lake Watershed (Montenegro).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the proposed Skadar Lake Watershed Biosphere Reserve in Montenegro. The region is of high ecological value due to its outstanding biodiversity and rich cultural heritage, with strong local engagement. The proposed zonation is based on ecosystem services within

the lake's watershed and human interaction with these resources. Key ecosystems – including the Adriatic coastline, Lake Skadar and associated karst and gorge systems – provide important services. The significance of the region's biodiversity is reflected in the presence of 11 EMERALD sites, 11 Important Plant Areas, 12 Key Biodiversity Areas and two Ramsar sites (Ulcinj Salina and Skadar Lake), which largely overlap with the proposed zonation.

77. The proposed biosphere reserve covers 254,694 ha, with core areas (1.95 per cent), buffer zones (15.97 per cent) and transition areas (82 per cent). Although the core areas represent less than 2 per cent of the site, they have national conservation status. The buffer zones further support biodiversity management, while the transition areas promote community engagement.

78. In 2025, a new plant species, *Petrolamium crnojevicii* (mint family), was discovered in the rocky karst substrate. Current conservation efforts focus in particular on the threatened Dalmatian pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*), with nesting support provided in Skadar Lake National Park.

79. With a human population of 233,186, including the capital city of Podgorica, the region is home to over one-third of Montenegro's population. The designation is expected to strengthen education, research and sustainable tourism, while addressing environmental challenges such as unplanned urbanization, illegal activities, pollution, unsustainable resource use and weak cross-sectoral coordination. The governance model of the proposed reserve is understood as a tool to address these issues and advance Montenegro's constitutional commitment as an ecological state. The proposal also highlights the added value of future transboundary cooperation.

80. The logistical function of the site is achieved through international initiatives, including Drin Basin management and improved wetland management for pelicans. The local School Network plays an important role in youth engagement.

81. The nomination dossier clearly acknowledges challenges related to urbanization, pollution, sand extraction and legacy industrial sites, mainly located in transition areas. Targeted waste management plans and continued monitoring of remediation sites will be essential.

82. The Advisory Committee commended the authorities on the strong commitment to community participation as a fourth core function, particularly through stakeholder workshops and situational analysis processes.

83. The Advisory Committee welcomed plans to expand protected areas and redesignate them as core areas in the future, and strongly encouraged the authorities to increase the coverage of the core area from 2 per cent.

84. The Advisory Committee requested clarification regarding the inclusion of the remote municipality of Nikšić within the transition area, along with a plan to ensure improved functional connectivity with the rest of the biosphere reserve. Future expansion of the marine area at Ada Bojana to cover the full coastline is also recommended.

85. Where potentially polluting activities such as sand mining or industrial waste occur in transition areas, careful monitoring and management are strongly recommended. The Committee advised the authorities to:

- conduct socio-economic and environmental impact assessments on the extractive industries, based on national laws, regulation and related mitigation measures to maintain ecological integrity;
- integrate industry representatives into biosphere reserve governance structures to support mitigation efforts; and
- provide a clear assessment of how the industry's presence affects the buffer zone and core area, existing continuous monitoring of environmental parameters for early identification of any negative trends, and the transparency of reporting.

86. Finally, continued efforts towards transboundary collaboration with Albania, particularly regarding water pollution, waste management and fisheries in the shared Lake Skadar/Shkodër, and with the proposed Lake Shkodër Biosphere Reserve in Albania, are strongly recommended to ensure effective conservation and sustainable management.

87. The Advisory Committee congratulated the candidate site on this participatory proposal and recommended that the site be **approved pending** receipt of the following information by **15 May 2026**:

    a. An updated zonation map with clear labels for municipalities to facilitate understanding among external audiences of the relationship with the text.

    b. An explanation of the connectivity of the remote Nikšić municipality.

    c. Environmental impact assessments, monitoring and/or plans to mitigate the risk caused by extractive and polluting industries in the transition area.

    d. A map showing the proposed neighbouring Albanian biosphere reserve to justify the provided zonation related to core areas along the border.

88. **Sur del Alto Paraná (Paraguay).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the nomination proposal for the Sur del Alto Paraná Biosphere Reserve, located in the Upper Paraná Atlantic Forest ecoregion, which faces threats from long-standing deforestation and agricultural expansion. The proposed biosphere reserve covers 172,565 ha and includes a mosaic of protected areas, forest remnants, aquatic ecosystems, agricultural landscapes and human settlements.

89. The core areas of the proposed biosphere reserve are two legally recognized protected areas: the Ñacunday National Park and the Moisés Bertoni Scientific Monument. The local economy within the proposed biosphere reserve is based primarily on agricultural production, livestock raising and agro-industrial activities, with potential identified for transition towards agroecological practices, environmental certification schemes and differentiated value chains. However, the nomination dossier does not provide sufficient information about the urban economy of the city of Presidente Franco or its interaction with the proposed biosphere reserve, particularly with regard to waste management, wastewater treatment systems and environmental quality standards for air, water and soil.

90. The zoning of the proposed biosphere reserve is clearly delineated. Nevertheless, the Advisory Committee noted that the buffer zone represents only a relatively small proportion of the total area, accounting for approximately 7.2 per cent of the proposed biosphere reserve, and may be insufficient to effectively fulfil its protective and supportive functions for the two core areas. The buffer zone also includes highly fragmented landscapes dominated by mechanized monoculture agriculture and livestock activities. While the buffer along the Paraná River plays an important role in connecting the two core areas and linking municipalities and riverine communities, the limited spatial extent of the buffer zone raises concerns regarding its capacity to mitigate anthropogenic pressures on the core areas.

91. Additional pressures include unplanned settlements, infrastructure development, illegal hunting, extraction of wild species, forest fires, unsustainable use of native forests and the absence of complete physical demarcation of reserve boundaries, which facilitates encroachment and inappropriate land use. Despite these pressures, the area still contains forest fragments of high conservation value within the Upper Paraná Atlantic Forest ecoregion.

92. The proposed governance structure is an autonomous interinstitutional coordination mechanism linked to the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development and municipal authorities. Both core areas have approved management plans, and the Moisés Bertoni Scientific Monument has a public use plan. The proposal also foresees an integrated management plan covering the core, buffer and transition areas.

93. The Advisory Committee commended the initiative to establish the ‘Tribu de la Biosfera

Sur' as a collaborative community bringing together individuals, institutions and organizations that recognize themselves as stewards of the Upper Paraná Atlantic Forest.

94. The proposed biosphere reserve includes districts with a predominantly young population, Mbya Guaraní communities and small-scale rural producers. A 2025 participatory diagnosis identified seven Mbya Guaraní communities within the area, including one inside the Moisés Bertoni Scientific Monument and one in the area of influence of Ñacunday National Park.

95. Takin into consideration the information provided, the Advisory Committee recommended that the proposal be **approved pending** the submission of additional information and clarifications. The Advisory Committee requested the national authorities to submit the following information by **15 May 2026:**

    a. A revised zoning proposal including an expanded buffer zone, or an explanation for how the buffer zoning configuration will effectively fulfil its protective and supportive functions for both core areas, reduce anthropogenic pressures, and enhance ecological connectivity within the Upper Paraná Atlantic Forest ecoregion.

    b. A management plan outline which will:

        i. Include a more detailed analysis of the urban economy of the city of Presidente Franco and its interaction with the biosphere reserve, including industrial and domestic waste management, wastewater treatment systems, and environmental quality standards for air, water and soil;

        ii. Integrate the objectives and actions of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan into the proposed integrated management framework of the biosphere reserve;

        iii. Provide detailed information on the current productive models applied to agricultural and livestock activities within the proposed biosphere reserve, specifying whether these activities follow intensive, extensive, regenerative or other relevant approaches;

        iv. Submit regulatory and normative information concerning the use of agrochemicals, pesticides and related inputs, including applicable legal frameworks, control and monitoring mechanisms, and existing guidelines, with particular attention to their potential direct and indirect impacts on water resources, soils and biodiversity, especially in areas adjacent to the core areas; and

        v. Indicate whether mechanisms will be established to promote youth participation in the governance of the biosphere reserve, including the possible creation of a youth network.

96. **Serra da Estrela (Portugal).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the proposal for the designation of the Serra da Estrela Biosphere Reserve, located in the Mediterranean biogeographical region and covering an area of 237,299 ha across six municipalities, with a population of 130,041 inhabitants. The Committee acknowledged the richness of the territory, which hosts 3,554 documented species, including endemic and threatened taxa, as well as high mountain habitats unique in Portugal, and recognised its strong biocultural character shaped by long-standing interactions between people and nature.

97. The Advisory Committee noted that the proposed biosphere reserve presents a clear zonation system in line with the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, comprising core areas (9 per cent), buffer zones (28.6 per cent) and transition areas (62.4 per cent). The Committee further observed that, in terms of zonation and spatial positioning, the shapefiles provided are consistent with the map included in the nomination form. However, the formatting of the files does not fully

comply with the established technical guidelines.

98. The Committee further observed that the conservation function is supported by an established network of protected areas, including the Serra da Estrela Natural Park, Natura 2000 sites and a Ramsar site, contributing to the protection of ecosystems of high ecological value.

99. The Committee also recognised the importance of the territory for sustainable development, noting the diversity of economic activities, including pastoralism, agri-food production, forestry, tourism and traditional industries such as wool and cheese production. In this context, the Committee acknowledged the emphasis placed on maintaining traditional practices such as transhumance, as well as the efforts to strengthen local value chains and promote inclusive territorial development.

100. Regarding the logistic support function, the Advisory Committee noted that the proposal builds on existing research capacity, academic partnerships and local initiatives, including monitoring of climate change impacts, environmental education and engagement with UNESCO networks. The Committee further welcomed the intention to integrate the management of the Estrela UNESCO Global Geopark and the future Biosphere Reserve under a unified governance structure.

101. The Advisory Committee also welcomed the participatory approach underpinning the nomination, based on a co-management model involving local authorities, national institutions and stakeholders, supported by an Co-Management Plan of the Serra da Estrela Natural Park (2024–2027) and a Community Forum bringing together 31 local entities. The Committee considered that this bottom-up approach provides a solid basis for inclusive governance and local ownership.

102. However, the Advisory Committee noted a significant gap in the treatment of active mining within the management framework. Although identified as an economic activity in the transition area, it is not adequately reflected in strategic priorities or management instruments and is mainly addressed from a historical perspective.

103. This gap extends to the regulatory and technical framework, as key mining legislation and existing impact assessments (e.g. Panasqueira, Gonçalo, Seixo Amarelo) are not referenced.

104. While governance efforts and the exclusion of lithium extraction are noted, they do not substitute for a clear assessment of impacts. In particular, the lack of detail on water protection raises concerns for long-term sustainability in this ‘water tower‘ region.

105. Finally, mining indicators are included but not sufficiently linked to safeguards or mitigation measures.

106. Taking into account the overall quality of the nomination, the Advisory Committee considered that the proposal is solid and well-structured. However, the identified gaps regarding mining activities and their potential impacts need to be addressed to ensure full compliance with the Statutory Framework and the long-term sustainability of the biosphere reserve.

107. Taking into account the information provided, the Advisory Committee recommended that the proposal be **approved pending** the submission of additional information. The Advisory Committee requested the national authorities to submit the following information by 15 May 2026:

a. A formal commitment to integrate active mining activities into the management instruments of the biosphere reserve, including the incorporation – where available – of Environmental Impact Assessments

(EIAs) for active sites (such as Panasqueira, Gonçalo and Seixo Amarelo), as well as a technical assessment of the compatibility of extractive activities with the conservation objectives of the MAB Programme, particularly in relation to water resources.

b. Information on projected expansion and new mining developments within the proposed biosphere reserve.
c. A single shapefile containing three distinct polygons corresponding to the core area(s), buffer zone(s) and transition area(s).

108. **Matibay na Bayan ng Sablayan (the Philippines).** The proposed Matibay na Bayan ng Sablayan Biosphere Reserve covers the entire Sablayan Municipality in the Province of Occidental Mindoro, encompassing almost 39 per cent of the total area of the province. The name 'Matibay Na Bayan Sablayan' means 'strong and resilient municipality of Sablayan' in the Tagalog language. The total area of the proposed biosphere reserve amounts to 327,880 ha. The core areas cover 86,265 ha (70,188 ha of terrestrial area and 16,077 ha of marine area). These areas comprise seven terrestrial and ten marine established protected areas under national or local legislation.

109. The proposed Matibay na Bayan ng Sablayan Biosphere Reserve is home to Indigenous Peoples, particularly the Alangan and Taubuid Mangyan tribes, two of the eight ethno-linguistic groups that inhabit the mountainous and isolated parts of Sablayan. The majority of the permanent population, amounting to around 84,898 people in 2022, live in the transition areas. Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood in Sablayan, especially the cultivation of staple crops such as rice and corn. Sablayan's unique landscape and rich cultural heritage constitute the foundation of local sustainable development, with eco-tourism functioning as a vital driver of both conservation and community enrichment.

110. A Biosphere Management Council of Sablayan will be established for the proposed biosphere reserve, consisting of key stakeholders: heads and representatives from the local government unit, national line agencies, academic institutions and other relevant organizations.

111. The Advisory Committee acknowledged the development potential of the area as a biosphere reserve and concluded that the proposed site be **approved pending** submission of the following information to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**:

a. An explanation as to how the integrity of the two terrestrial core areas will be maintained without negative impacts from neighbouring areas (e.g. designated

protected areas in these areas), given the absence of buffer or transition areas for certain boundaries of the core areas adjacent to the administrative boundaries.

b. Clarification regarding the 'disputed area' indicated on 'Map 13: Terrestrial zonation map' (p. 95) and 'Map 34: Boundary Dispute Map' (p. 224) in the nomination form, including any possible impacts that the disputed area and 'the resource access and management conflicts' mentioned in Section 17.2.1 may have on management of the proposed biosphere reserve.

c. An updated version of the submitted Integrated Matibay na Bayan ng Sablayan Management Plan 2026–2035 reflecting the zonation change in a transition area (Municipal Waters).

d. The appropriate 'signature on behalf of the MAB National Committee or focal point' appended in Section 5.5, in place of the signature of the Municipal Mayor.

112. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee recommended:

a. The implementation of active measures to manage visitor impacts, such as scientific assessments of carrying capacity.

b. Effective coordination and operation of the proposed Biosphere Management Council of Sablayan, taking note of the large number of proposed participating entities. Other Philippines biosphere reserves may be able to provide guidance in this regard.

Extension, re-zoning or renaming of existing biosphere reserves recommended for approval

113. **Hanma-Huzhong (China).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the proposal for the extension and renaming of Hanma-Huzhong, originally designated in 2015 as Hanma Biosphere Reserve. The site is situated in the heart of the northern Grand Khingan mountain range, spanning the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and Heilongjiang Province at the intersection of the main ridge of the Grand Khingan and the Yiluhuli Mountains. The reserve encompasses one of China's best-preserved cold-temperate, bright-coniferous forests (taiga), characterized by vast stretches of pristine Dahurian larch (*Larix gmelinii*).

114. The Advisory Committee recognized that the proposed extension of the Hanma Biosphere Reserve to incorporate the Huzhong Reserve would promote ecosystem integrity. The total area of the extended Hanma-Huzhong reserve is 279,118 ha, and consists of a core area of 100,597 ha, a buffer zone of 93,474 ha and two transition areas totalling 85,047 ha. The extension is expected to improve the ability of the reserve to preserve the integrity of the typical cold-temperate bright coniferous forest ecosystem and to protect the rare and endangered wild flora and fauna.

115. There are no permanent residents within the biosphere reserve. However, approximately 37,000 people enter and reside seasonally while engaging in subsistence activities in the transition area. These include the Ewenki, China's last hunting tribe and the only reindeer-herding ethnic group in China.

116. The Advisory Committee took note of the implementation of the Hanma Biosphere Reserve Management Plan (2025–2034) and the Hanma-Huzhong Biosphere Reserve Management Plan (2025–2034). The Hanma Biosphere Reserve management plan is implemented by the Biosphere Reserve Co-management Committee. The Inner Mongolia Grand Khingan Hanma National Nature Reserve Administration and the Heilongjiang Huzhong National Nature Reserve Administration are responsible for the management and protection of the core and buffer zones of the biosphere reserve. The transition area is jointly managed by stakeholders including the Biosphere Reserve Co-management Committee and local communities, primarily to ensure the effective functioning of the

biosphere reserve's developmental objectives.

117. The Advisory Committee concluded that the extension and renaming of the biosphere reserve should be **approved**. The Advisory Committee further asked that the national authorities submit the following information to the MAB Secretariat by **15 May 2026**:

a. An explanation for the absence of a transition area surrounding the outer boundary of the buffer zones in the northern and southern parts of the extended biosphere reserve.

b. Shapefiles for the extended biosphere reserve.

c. Videos and photos along with the completed and signed form granting UNESCO rights to their use.

118. **Po Grande (Italy).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the proposal to extend the Po Grande Biosphere Reserve. The site is structured around Italy's main river system and consists of a large-scale socio-ecological landscape characterized by riparian ecosystems, wetlands, agricultural plains, urban settlements and industrial areas. The proposed extension reinforces the longitudinal continuity of the river basin, enhances the representation of floodplains and agricultural mosaics, and increases the number of municipalities involved to 102. The extension consolidates the role of the biosphere reserve as a model territory for integrated river basin management, climate change adaptation, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, fully consistent with the Lima Action Plan, the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan and the MAB Programme's strategic objectives. The Advisory Committee noted that the proposed extension significantly strengthens the ecological coherence, functional connectivity and governance relevance of the biosphere reserve along the Po River corridor. The extension responds to previous recommendations of the IACBR and demonstrates a high level of technical rigour, institutional coordination and alignment with the objectives of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

119. The extended area encompasses a wide diversity of ecosystems, including riverine habitats, wetlands, agricultural landscapes and peri-urban systems, with a clear gradation of human pressures. The extension improves ecological representativeness at the basin scale and reinforces landscape connectivity. Core areas and buffer zones are based largely on officially designated Natura 2000 sites and protected areas. The Committee noted that minor cartographic inconsistencies resulting in small buffer polygons enclosed within core areas are clearly explained and justified as technical artefacts linked to non-harmonized official datasets. These do not undermine the conservation function and are planned to be addressed through future inter-institutional coordination. The extension reinforces the reserve's capacity to address sustainable agriculture, water management, climate resilience and territorial cohesion. The strong involvement of municipalities ensures that sustainable development objectives are locally grounded and socially legitimate.

120. The proposed extension results in a biosphere reserve of sufficient size to effectively perform all three MAB functions. The Po Grande Biosphere Reserve demonstrates a well-developed logistical support function, supported by universities, public authorities and technical institutions. The river basin scale offers high potential for long-term monitoring and applied research on climate adaptation and water governance. The use of CORINE Land Cover 2018 data is justified by the absence of a more recent harmonized dataset at European level and ensures methodological consistency across the entire biosphere reserve. The governance system is inclusive, clearly structured and innovative. The central role of the Mayors' Assembly as the management decision-making body reflects a strong bottom-up approach. The relationship between the Mayors' Assembly, the Steering Committee and the Po River Basin District Authority is clearly articulated and institutionally sound. The Advisory Committee particularly welcomed the establishment of a Permanent

Round Table for Institutional Negotiations.

121. The role of the Autorità di Bacino Distrettuale del Fiume Po (ADBPO) as Coordinating Body and Technical Secretariat provides institutional continuity, administrative capacity, and strategic alignment with national and EU water policies. The budgetary information provided demonstrates sustained financial commitment and increasing project-based funding, although the Advisory Committee encouraged continued diversification of funding sources to support the growing scale of activities.

122. The Advisory Committee concluded that the extension and renaming of the biosphere reserve should be **approved**. The Committee further encouraged the authorities to continue efforts towards the harmonization of cartographic datasets and to build on the reserve's strong governance model as a reference for large river-basin biosphere reserves within the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

123. **La Siberia Biosphere Reserve (Spain).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the proposal to extend the La Siberia Biosphere Reserve, designated in 2019, through the incorporation of three additional municipalities.

124. The report details the fulfilment of the biosphere reserve's functions and justifies the new zonation. with all core areas which lack buffer zones bordering protected areas recognized by the Natura 2000 network.

125. The site covers a total of 195,196 ha, with the core area accounting for 11 per cent, the buffer zone for 45 per cent and the transition area for 42 per cent. The main activities carried out in this reserve relate to rural development, agribusiness and tourism.

126. The biosphere reserve has an established governance model and regulations. The Management Plan for the reserve has been developed in a participatory manner with the aim of fully integrating the new areas and achieving the specified objectives. The site is also addressing the situation of young people in the reserve in a comprehensive manner.

127. The Committee welcomed the additional information provided by the authorities in response to the Advisory Committee's request. This included the authorities' official letters of support, the clarification of boundaries within the core areas and details of the budget, as well as authorization for the publication of photos and videos. As the information received was deemed satisfactory, the Advisory Committee concluded that the extension of the biosphere reserve should be **approved**.

128. **Sierra de las Nieves Biosphere Reserve (Spain).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the proposal for the extension and partial rezoning of the Sierra de las Nieves Biosphere Reserve, designated in 1995. The proposed modification entails an increase of 4,878 ha, bringing the total surface area to 98,106 ha.

129. The biosphere reserve is situated within the Mediterranean forest ecoregion of the southwestern Iberian Peninsula and is characterized by a high mountain range of significant ecological value. The total population of the municipalities forming part of the biosphere reserve amounts to 66,128 inhabitants. The most economically significant forestry activity is cork harvesting, while agricultural activities are based primarily on grazing and beekeeping.

130. The proposed modification concerns an increase in the size of the core area, which corresponds to the Sierra de las Nieves National Park. Certain core areas directly border transition areas that are characterized by traditional, extensive and low-impact mountain farming, notably in the municipality of Yunquera. According to the information provided, this situation has not compromised the conservation function of the biosphere reserve and has been maintained for 31 years under annual monitoring in accordance with the Natural Resources Management Plan and the Management Master Plan.

131. Governance structures are in place, and the biosphere reserve management strategy is

based on the above-mentioned planning instruments. The Management Master Plan is currently being updated to incorporate the full extent of the proposed extension.

132. The Advisory Committee welcomed the additional information provided by the national authorities in response to its request, including clarification of the boundaries of the core areas, updated information on the revision of the Management Plan, details regarding the coordination of the biosphere reserve, the provision of shapefiles and authorization for the publication of photos and videos. The Advisory Committee welcomed this very well-documented nomination proposal and recommended that the extension be **approved**.

133. **Sierra Nevada (Spain).** The Advisory Committee welcomed the proposal for the extension and partial adjustment of the zoning scheme of the Sierra Nevada Biosphere Reserve, designated in 1986. The proposal aims to strengthen the sustainable development function of the transition area while ensuring coherence with national protected area regulations and the Natura 2000 framework. In Spain, protected areas such as National and Natural Parks operate under strict regulatory regimes, and the proposed zoning adjustments seek to further align these frameworks with the objectives of the MAB Programme.

134. The proposal represents an increase from 172,238 ha to 244,442 ha, equivalent to a 29.5 per cent increase in the size of the reserve. It addresses the specific situation of certain core areas which are directly adjacent to transition areas without an intermediate buffer zone. The information provided clarifies that these core areas are subject to strict protection measures as part of the National Park, and that conservation objectives have not been compromised. In response to earlier recommendations to reinforce the sustainable development function of the transition area, the extension focuses on strengthening and expanding this zone. A system of Áreas Prioritarias de Intervención (Priority Intervention Areas) within the transition area has been established to function as a dynamic form of buffering through active ecological restoration, connectivity enhancement and the development of green infrastructure.

135. The Committee also examined the governance and coordination mechanisms in place at the regional level. The updated legal framework in Andalucía, including the establishment of the Andalusian Council of Biosphere Reserves, provides a structured mechanism for inter-institutional coordination and the coherent implementation of conservation, sustainable development and logistical support functions across biosphere reserves. Documentation submitted, including meeting records and action plans, demonstrates a coordinated planning and management system. Financial information indicates diversified funding sources from national, regional and local authorities, as well as project-based resources, with an estimated total budget of €22.2 million for 2026, including a dedicated allocation for sustainable development and provision for the proposed extension.

136. The Advisory Committee welcomed the proposal and recommended that the extension be **approved**.

Extension, re-zoning or renaming of existing biosphere reserves recommended for approval pending the submission of specific information:

125. No submissions for extension, re-zoning or renaming of existing biosphere reserves were recommended for approval pending the submission of specific information.

Proposals for new biosphere reserves or extensions/modifications/renaming to existing biosphere reserves recommended for deferral:

126. **Alto Paraguá – Marfil (Bolivia).** The proposed Alto Paraguá – Marfil Biosphere Reserve is a strategically important area for the conservation of diverse ecosystems in eastern

Bolivia. The site is located at the convergence of several major ecological units, including the Chiquitano Dry Forest, the flooded savannahs of the Pantanal, Amazonian forests and the Chiquitano Cerrado. This ecological mosaic supports high levels of biodiversity and key ecosystem services, particularly those related to water regulation, carbon retention and landscape connectivity.

127. The nomination appropriately highlights community-based management, traditional knowledge and sustainable production models as key elements linking conservation and local development. The Advisory Committee further commended the bottom-up process that led to the proposal, recognizing strong community ownership as a solid foundation for long-term stewardship in the face of current pressures.

128. The nomination indicates that the proposed biosphere reserve has strong potential to serve as a regional demonstration site for sustainable development in a landscape under intense land use change. The Committee positively noted ongoing initiatives such as regenerative livestock management, silvopastoral systems, community-based aquaculture, bioeconomy activities and environmental education rooted in traditional knowledge.

129. Notwithstanding these positive elements, the Advisory Committee noted that the current zoning configuration is not consistent with the Statutory Framework. Buffer zones are neither adjacent to nor surrounding the core areas but are configured in a manner that does not effectively reduce pressures on the most sensitive areas. As a result, the zoning does not fulfil the intended protective and integrative function of buffer zones under the Statutory Framework, namely to safeguard core areas from anthropogenic pressures and to facilitate compatibility between conservation and sustainable use. The Committee further noted that this misalignment may expose critical areas, including those essential for water recharge and aquatic biodiversity, to increase risks of degradation. Therefore, the Committee recommended that the nomination be **deferred** and welcomed the authorities to resubmit the nomination file with the following information:

    a. A revised zoning proposal and cartographic representation, including an updated zoning map, demonstrating how core areas of high conservation value are effectively surrounded or directly protected by adjacent buffer zones, ensuring coherence with the Statutory Framework and the zoning principles of the MAB Programme, and explaining how this revised configuration minimizes human pressures while allowing compatible and carefully managed sustainable uses.

130. **Vitória – Trindade Marine (Brazil).** The proposed Vitória – Trindade Marine Biosphere Reserve is located along Brazil's coast and encompasses the Vitória – Trindade Chain, one of the most significant marine biodiversity corridors in the South Atlantic. The proposed site includes a complex mosaic of coastal, island and oceanic ecosystems within Brazil's EEZ extending from the continental shelf of Espírito Santo to the remote oceanic islands of Trindade and Martim Vaz. These marine and coastal territories are currently included within the Mata Atlântica Biosphere Reserve and are proposed for re-designation under the new, predominantly marine biosphere reserve. The nomination highlights the region's exceptional biological richness, high levels of endemism and ecological connectivity, particularly in the form of seamounts, mesophotic reefs, rhodolith beds and migratory corridors that link coastal and oceanic environments, underscoring the reserve's importance for large-scale marine conservation and ecosystem functioning.

131. The Advisory Committee noted that the proposal builds on a long-standing institutional process initiated in 2009 and strengthened through engagement with federal, state and municipal authorities, research institutions, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders. The nomination further emphasizes the social, economic and strategic relevance of the proposed area, which supports a wide range of human activities, including artisanal and industrial fishing, navigation, port operations, tourism, scientific research, and extractive industries with active mining, natural gas and oil concessions.

132. Following the technical comments provided by the Secretariat at the end of 2025, an additional report was submitted indicating that a substantial portion of the coastal territory previously overlapping with the Mata Atlântica Biosphere Reserve was excluded as part of a re-zoning process. As a result of this territorial reduction (from 58,096 ha to 57,584 ha), a significant decrease in the population of the proposed biosphere reserve was reported from 3,040 Indigenous People and 2,055,000 inhabitants to 292 households corresponding to approximately 1,000 inhabitants.

133. These circumstances substantially affected the entire nomination dossier and require a comprehensive review to ensure internal consistency and compliance with the applicable criteria.

134. In consideration of the above points, the Advisory Committee concluded that the nomination cannot be approved at this stage and recommends that the proposal be **deferred**. In revising the nomination and in light of the proposed new zoning, it will be important to consider carefully the broader context in which the proposed biosphere reserve is located, paying particular attention to extractive activities, given the site's location within the Espírito Santo Basin. This basin constitutes a key region for oil and gas production in Brazil and plays a strategic role in the country's energy development. The Committee therefore encouraged the national authorities to resubmit the nomination dossier, incorporating the following requested information, clarifications and revisions:

c. Detailed information on the exact human population for each zone of the biosphere reserve, including numbers and spatial distribution.
d. Confirmation of the total surface area expressed in hectares in accordance with the revised proposal.
e. A comprehensive description of the proposed governance model, ensuring alignment with the new zoning scheme and the objectives of the actors operating within the biosphere reserve, clarifying the nature of the future body responsible for the biosphere reserve management, outlining how partnerships and collaboration mechanisms with all relevant stakeholders will be strengthened to enhance their effective participation in biosphere reserve governance, and ensuring compliance with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan and the Statutory Framework.
f. An outline of the Management Plan, integrating existing planning instruments and management frameworks applicable to the area, including an explanation of the management mechanisms foreseen for the different zones of the proposed biosphere reserve, including considerations related to the presence of international waters.
g. Information on the current social and ecological dynamics, as well as further details on how Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) were involved in the preparation of the biosphere reserve nomination process.
h. Clarification as to how research, education and capacity development initiatives within the territory contribute to the three functions of the biosphere reserve.
i. A high-quality map and corresponding shapefiles clearly delineating the three zones of the proposed biosphere reserve, including a justification for the apparent exclusion of a small portion of Trindade Island observed in the shapefiles received, and an explanation of the status of this area and its zone of influence in the final zonation map.
j. Details of measures being taken to mitigate the impacts of port activities and fishing associated with the proposed zonation of the biosphere reserve, and confirmation as to whether a monitoring model is envisaged.
k. With regard to the development of mining activities, the Advisory Committee acknowledges the delimitation of current and potential maritime concession zones within the proposal for the new biosphere reserve, and therefore requests the authorities to submit a maritime appendix on mining activities within the

proposed biosphere reserve, including:

i. Clarification of the applicable legal framework for extractive industries, specifying whether existing concessions are subject to current regulations or prohibitions on mining in protected areas, and the implications for each zone of the biosphere reserve.
ii. Approved extraction plans validated and supervised by the competent authorities, including timelines and detailed descriptions of activities.
iii. A certificate of compliance with the environmental license or equivalent, supported by relevant documentation.
iv. Environmental monitoring and follow-up reports related to extractive activities in the area.
v. A management strategy to prevent, mitigate or minimize conflicts between extractive activities and conservation objectives within the proposed biosphere reserve.
vi. Clear restrictions on extractive activities, especially in core areas, to protect biodiversity and marine ecosystems.

l. A description of the strategy to ensure effective inclusion of youth in the activities of the biosphere reserve.

135. **Central Polissia (Ukraine).** The Advisory Committee welcomed this biosphere reserve nomination submitted by the Ukrainian authorities. The proposed site is situated in the central part of the Polissia lowland, surrounding the former Chernobyl nuclear power plant. It encompasses the deltas of the Prypiat and Desna Rivers, the middle reaches of the Dnipro River and more than a dozen medium-sized rivers, many with broad, swampy floodplains. Polissia is also characterized by numerous natural and artificial lakes and ponds. Two major protected areas, perceived as key stakeholders, are the Mizhrichynskyi Regional Landscape Park and the Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve.

136. The total proposed area is 394,341 ha, of which 115,006 ha are core areas, 839,69 ha are buffer zones and 195,366 ha are transition areas. The proposed zonation comprises all required zones and adheres to the Statutory Framework.

137. The proposed site encompasses areas from two subregions, Kyiv Polissia and Chernihiv Polissia, with a total population of 38,000 inhabitants. In Kyiv Polissia, challenging natural conditions, extensive forest cover and low population density contribute to relatively modest agricultural productivity. Agriculture in Chernihiv Polissia follows a similar pattern, with an emphasis on crop cultivation alongside cattle and pig breeding. Recreation and tourism are indicated as activities with some potential for development.

138. The Advisory Committee acknowledged that the proposed reserve has a completely unique history in terms of human impact on nature. The site demonstrates an entirely unique combination of unprecedented anthropogenic impact with four decades of mitigated rewilding. These conditions may provide for exceptional environmental and social projects, as well as research and the generation of unique scientific data on radiation effects, while potentially hindering the development function.

139. The Advisory Committee welcomed the confirmation that no facilities for storing or managing radioactive waste are located within the proposed biosphere reserve, and therefore that no direct radiological risks originate from within the site. It also noted that nearby radioactive waste management facilities are equipped with safety systems that comply with national emergency prevention standards. The risk of military intrusion is considered to be low due to strong border protection, with Ukrainian environmental legislation providing safeguards for appropriate land use practices. However, despite the information provided, the close proximity of a major nuclear disaster site remains a

significant concern and did not fully reassure the Advisory Committee of the overall safety of the proposed area and its capacity to fulfil equally all the biosphere reserve functions.

140. The Advisory Committee noted that the nomination dossier does not fully follow the template provided by the Secretariat. Specifically, Chapter 12 on ecosystem services and Chapter 13 outlining the main objectives for the biosphere reserve designation are missing. In addition, while information related to the conservation function is presented and some elements of logistical support are mentioned, the proposals for fulfilling the development function are not clearly described.

141. The Advisory Committee noted the preparatory work undertaken to establish a governance structure. A Coordination (Advisory) Council for the biosphere reserve is in the process of being formed, with a draft framework currently under discussion. The council is expected to include representatives of local governments, leaders of relevant enterprises and organizations, and researchers and educators. Its role will be to coordinate activities within the site, provide guidance on strategic development, and address key management and conservation issues.

142. The Committee noted the absence of an outline for a biosphere reserve management plan. Instead, the dossier makes reference to the management plans of the Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve and the Mizhrichynskyi Regional Landscape Park.

143. The Advisory Committee recognized that Ukraine qualifies as a country in conflict, which further strengthens the positive reception of this nomination proposal. However, due to the current challenging circumstances and the lack of certain essential information about the proposed site, the Committee recommended that the nomination be **deferred**.

144. The Advisory Committee recommended that the Ukrainian authorities use the unedited official nomination form, respond to all required questions and submit an updated nomination dossier at their earliest convenience. Above all, the Committee requested the following information:

a. An explanation of how the development function will be implemented within the proposed site.

b. A map clearly showing the overlap between the proposed biosphere reserve boundaries and zones and those of the Exclusion Zone.

c. A comprehensive outline of the Biosphere Reserve Management Plan, based on the goals presented in the nomination dossier.

d. Clarification of the composition of the biosphere reserve governance body, including the roles of different stakeholders, proposed staffing capacities and an appropriate budget with dedicated funding for biosphere reserve coordination.

e. An explanation as to how proximity to the nuclear disaster site will influence or affect the balanced implementation of all biosphere reserve functions.

f. Information on whether, and in what ways, military training areas may impact the surrounding proposed biosphere reserve, especially its biodiversity.

145. To help ease the pressures created by the ongoing military conflict, the Advisory Committee further recommended consulting the Technical Guidelines for Biosphere Reserves, seeking support from established biosphere reserves, drawing on experience gained within the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and requesting technical assistance from the MAB Secretariat to ensure that all actions by the Ukrainian authorities align with the criteria of the MAB Programme.

ANNEX 5

Annex 5

Proposal by the Bureau of the International Co-ordinating Council of the MAB Programme

Review and Refinement of the Process of Excellence

The Bureau of the International Co-ordinating Council,

Recalling the objectives of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme and the World Network of Biosphere Reserves,

Recalling also the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan and its emphasis on strengthening the effectiveness, coherence and impact of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves,

Recognizing the importance of maintaining high standards across the Network while ensuring fairness, inclusiveness and support for all biosphere reserves,

Taking note of the experience gained since the introduction of the Process of Excellence,

Acknowledging the diversity of ecological, social, cultural, institutional and economic contexts in which biosphere reserves operate,

Recognizing that the implementation of the Process of Excellence has revealed a range of complex situations and practical challenges, including differences in governance arrangements, capacities, resources and national circumstances,

Noting that these experiences highlight the need for greater clarity, consistency, transparency and predictability in the implementation of the Process of Excellence, while preserving the objectives and integrity of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves,

Considering that a review of the current framework could contribute to strengthening both the effectiveness of the Process of Excellence and the support provided to biosphere reserves facing implementation challenges,

Recommends that the International Co-ordinating Council:

Invite the Secretariat, in consultation with Member States, MAB National Committees, IACBR, other relevant advisory bodies and stakeholders, to undertake a review of the current framework governing the Process of Excellence;

Request that, on the basis of this review, the Secretariat prepare proposals for amendments or refinements to the existing framework, taking into account the lessons learned from implementation and the diversity of situations encountered throughout the World Network of Biosphere Reserves;

Request that such proposals, inter alia:

(a) clarify the procedures, stages, criteria and expected outcomes of the Process of Excellence;

(b) enhance transparency, consistency, predictability and equitable treatment in its implementation;

(c) provide greater flexibility in addressing complex situations while maintaining the standards and objectives of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves;

(d) strengthen support mechanisms for biosphere reserves experiencing difficulties, including capacity-building, technical assistance, mentoring and peer-learning opportunities;

(e) facilitate the continued improvement, effectiveness and long-term retention of sites within the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, in line with the objectives of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan;

Request the Secretariat to report to the Bureau and the Council on progress achieved and to present draft proposals for consideration at a future session of the International Co-ordinating Council, subject to available resources;

Encourage Member States, MAB National Committees and biosphere reserve managers to contribute actively to this review process through the sharing of experiences, challenges, lessons learned and good practices.