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The International Symposia on Sturgeons (ISS) are central events for all interested in sturgeon and paddlefish, their biology, conservation and aquaculture. The events are held every 4 years, bringing together the global expertise on sturgeons in order to facilitate information exchange and to promote new ideas while sharing results on sturgeon research. The first international sturgeon meeting was held in Bordeaux, France (October 3–6, 1989) and served as an initial attempt to compile biological data on sturgeons and develop an understanding of the status of most of the populations, thus encouraging the conservation management approach. Most of the contributions in Bordeaux came from the former USSR, North America and Western Europe (Rosenthal, 1990). The second sturgeon meeting was held 4 years later in Moscow, Russia (September 3–11, 1993) and was organized jointly by the EAS (European Aquaculture Society), WSCS (Russian Federal Research Institute of Fishery Hydrobiophysics), and additional Russian organizations. It was the first time named 'International Symposium on Sturgeons'. The Symposium attracted a substantial proportion of contributions from Russia and Asia as well as from Central Europe (Gershmanovich and Smith, 1995). Subsequently, the third symposium took place in Piacenza, Italy (July 8–11, 1997), featuring contributions from Central and Southern Europe as well as from Russia and the Far East (Rosenthal et al., 1998). In recognition of the two previous meetings the organizing committee decided to use the 'ISS' abbreviation as a trade name for these Symposia, followed the subsequent number of the meeting. Therefore, the Piacenza Symposium was called 'ISS 3'. The 4th ISS took place in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, USA (July 1–4, 2001).

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(July 8–13, 2001) attracting a high attendance from North America resulting in a significantly increased number of contributions from the United States and Canada, while adding hands-on workshops to the scope of the ISS programme (Rosenthal et al., 2002). In 2003, WSCS was established also with the objective to provide a home for future ISS events while co-organizing these with the respective host countries. With the 5th ISS taking place in Ramsar, Iran (May 9–13, 2005), the focus of the ISS was on the Caspian Sea as one of the areas where the dwindling sturgeon stocks are at the brink of extinction (Rosenthal et al., 2006). Again, the meeting resulted in a high rate of local participants (scientists, administrators and fisheries managers from Caspian countries). The event for the first time was organized under the auspices of the WSCS (World Sturgeon Conservation Society) in close cooperation with the International Sturgeon Research Center in Ramsar, Iran and other national organizations.

At this ISS it was recognized that the critical status of most of the stocks has dramatically worsened while our understanding of the conservation needs have expanded since ISS1. In response to this alarming status assessment, the Organizing Committee together with all participants formulated the RAMSAR DECLARATION on Global Sturgeon Conservation. The declaration outlines specific conservation needs and measures to be implemented in order to reverse the current trend and save the sturgeon populations. The Ramsar Declaration has been distributed to respective agencies within range states world-wide and has also been published in the ISS Proceedings (Rosenthal et al., 2006).

During the inter-sessional period between ISS5 and ISS6, the RAMSAR DECLARATION has stimulated awareness on a global scale and contributed to the initiation of conservation activities in many countries. In particular the recommendations on requirements and best practices have been incorporated in the formulation of several regional (Blaesius et al., 2006; Rosenthal et al., 2009) and national (Gessner et al., 2010) Sturgeon Conservation Action Plans.

The 6th ISS held in Wuhan, China, October 26–31, 2009, expanded its scope, attracting also other international and inter-governmental agencies involved in sturgeon conservation, to jointly co-organize specific workshops. While one of these satellite workshops dealt with the 'Redlisting of Euro-Asian Sturgeon Species' (co-organized by IUCN-SSC-WSCS), the other was a 'Technical Workshop on Sturgeon hatchery guidelines' (jointly organized by FAO-WSCS-IUCN-SSC).