

ASSESSING AND PLANNING ACTIONS

National Biodiversity Reference Units Hold 3rd Consultation

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The ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation (ARCBC) assessed and confirmed its major accomplishments vis-à-vis operation at the national and regional levels during its third consultative meeting with the National Biodiversity Reference Unit (NBRU) Country Coordinators. Seven ASEAN member countries - Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam attended the meeting.

Representatives from the ASEAN Secretariat, the ASEAN Working Group on Nature Conservation and Biodiversity, and the ARCBC Co-Directors, programme administrator and staff also attended the meeting held from 19-20 March 2001 in

Brunei Darussalam. During the meeting, the Co-Directors emphasized the outputs of regular meetings of country NBRUs, Scientific Experts Committee and Steering Committee, and the progress that has taken place since these meetings. They also discussed the implementation status of the project's four main programs of activity, which are networking, training, research and database development.

The Co-Directors presented their vision for the long-term sustainability of the project. At present they said, the ARCBC responds more to its objectives and regional and national needs and less on the need to strengthen core activities and to disburse funds, among others. They therefore envisioned the setting up of a fund-raising section and improving the structure and organization of the

Centre while taking into consideration the strengths and weaknesses of the NBRUs.

The NBRU coordinators and the Co-Directors also discussed the results of the regional thematic workshops conducted last year, the status of the guidelines and framework agreement on access to biological and genetic resources, biosafety negotiation on genetically modified organisms, the standardization of biodiversity reporting and information sharing, and the selection and establishment of ASEAN heritage parks.

The participants agreed to reaffirm the responsibilities of the NBRUs and the ARCBC to improve on and finalize the sets of guidelines and proceed with the action plans.

Regarding the research program, the Co-Directors informed the NBRUs that the research projects and the release of grants amounting to 2.5 million euro have yet to be approved by the European Commission in Brussels. Hence, they requested the ASEAN Secretariat to urge EC for an early decision.

During the presentation of the approved annual workplan and budget, the Co-Directors stated that some

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activities may deviate from the plan provided they are approved by both the ARCBC and the EC. They urged the NBRUs to inform ARCBC of their proposed activities, especially those relating to technical aspects and information technology, that shall be done this year since funds have already been allocated.

Each country NBRU report reflected the following: 1) activities to date; 2) plans for the year 2001; 3) progress on data sharing; 4) updates on TNAs; 5) planned meetings; 6) project concerns; and 7) hardware needs.

Several issues regarding finance and administrative procedures and budget allocation especially the disbursement and reimbursement requirements and mechanisms were also clarified during the meeting. The disbursement of EC funds for activities in each NBRU would be tackled during the next NBRU-ARCBC consultative-meeting.

The technical issues discussed included the following: 1) development of web-based database and data management; 2) inclusion of national inputs into the biodiversity chapter of the ASEAN State of Environment Reports; 3) accession of Cambodia and Lao PDR to the project; 4) update on the proposed rider to the financing agreement; and 5) strategies to strengthen relationships between ARCBC and NBRU and between NBRUs.

Furthermore, the Centre, in consultation with the NBRUs, reviewed and finalized the provisional calendar of activities for the year. Other matters discussed were the implementing procedures for the proposed exchange program on ASEAN staff (biodiversity experts and EU chairs), and the contracting of people in every NBRU to help supply data and information to ARCBC, the mid-term evaluation, and for the preparation of documents for meetings.

The next consultative meeting will be held in Indonesia on October 7-10, 2001. ●

Surfing the Web... of Life

The Australian Community Biodiversity Network <http://cbn.org.au/member/cbn/> is a non-government, community-based network of organizations acting to increase community understanding of biodiversity and its value, provide easier access to biodiversity-related information, promote community involvement in biodiversity conservation, and work toward the full and effective implementation of the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity

Earthwatch Coordination, based in Geneva, extends the mandate and activities of the Division of Environmental Information, Assessment and Early Warning to the whole United Nations system. It provides leadership and direction to the UN System-wide Earthwatch established at the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. Its mission is to coordinate, harmonize and integrate observing, assessment and reporting activities across the UN system in order to provide environmental and appropriate socio-economic information for national and international decision-making on sustainable development and for early warning of emerging problems requiring international action. Further information on the organization of Earthwatch and its partnerships with some 50 parts of the UN system can be found on the Earthwatch web site (<http://www.unep.ch/earthw.html>).

UNEP Islands Web Site <http://www.unep.ch/islands.html> provides access to a number of resources concerning islands, primarily from within the United Nations system, that are otherwise rather scattered and difficult to obtain. It includes basic UN documents or extracts from documents relevant to islands, educational materials concerning islands, and a directory listing some 2,000 islands and giving their basic geographic, environmental and socio-economic characteristics.

The Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research (RMBR) is located at the National University of Singapore. It maintains a website <http://rmbn.nus.edu.sg/> hosting relevant information about its scientific activities, recent exploratory information gained in SE Asia, and reports from visiting biologists from overseas. The Museum houses the largest historical zoological collections from Malaysia including formerly known North

Borneo. The British zoologists residing in Singapore a century ago put the collection together. Many are the original or type specimens of new taxa described from the region. The website also introduces a new collection data of fresh water crustaceans, aquatic insects, spiders, birds and fishes, as well as bryophytes. It includes large databases of the IUCN-IAB on the world's most endangered bryophytes, mosses of East Asia and SE Asia. The RMBR website aims at becoming a regional information center on research institutions, museums, zoos and botanical gardens, as well as a source of updated bibliography on biodiversity relevant to SE Asiatic biota.

The Earth Times is an international nonpartisan newspaper that discusses issues concerning the human environment and interrelated concerns such as economic growth, humanitarian issues, and social development. Founded in 1991, the newspaper specifically explores the subject of change—how individuals and institutions work in their own societies to tackle their challenges and generate positive change in social and economic conditions. In particular, The Earth Times examines and conveys the workings of the global United Nations system, and that of multilateral and bilateral agencies. The newspaper can be accessed at www.earthtimes.org.

GRID-Geneva <http://www.grid.unep.ch/index.html> is part of UNEP's global network of environmental information centers, known as the Global Resource Information Database (GRID). GRIDs Geneva and Nairobi were the first centers to be launched in mid-1985. GRID aims to provide and facilitate access to environmental data and information for decision-making and policy setting, and to underpin UNEP's review of the state of the world's environment and provide early warning on emerging environmental threats. The GRID database <http://www.grid.unep.ch/data/index.html> is maintained for the purpose of assisting the international community and individual nations in making sound decisions related to resource management and environmental planning, and where applicable providing data for scientific studies. Within the overall GRID-network, GRID-Geneva focuses on the acquisition or creation, documentation, archive and dissemination of Global and European digital georeferenced environmental data. ●