

FOURTH ARCBC STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

ASOEN Approves ARCBC Programs for 2002; welcomes Laos and Cambodia

► By REXIE JANE PARREÑO

Members and representatives of the ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment (ASOEN) convened in Brunei Darussalam on 2 August 2001 to appraise the progress of project activities as well as approve the proposed activities of ARCBC for year 2002. This was the Fourth Meeting of the Steering Committee of the ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation (ARCBC); ASOEN members compose the Steering Committee.

The ASOEN Chairman, Mr. Sunthad Somchevita of Thailand, presided over the meeting, which was also attended by representatives of the ASEAN Secretariat, European Commission-Philippines and ARCBC.

ARCBC Co-Directors Mr. Gregorio I. Texon and Dr. John R. MacKinnon reported on the developments of the project since the last Steering Committee meeting in July last year. As to the planned activities for 2002, the Co-Directors said that the ASEAN Working Group on Nature Conservation and Biodiversity (AWGNCB) during their 11th meeting in 17-18 July 2001 in Melaka, Malaysia delegated to ARCBC the preparation of the project proposal on the water conservation program. This is in line with the program of the Southeast Asia Technical Advisory Committee of the Global Water Partnership to collaborate with the ASEAN on water management, focusing on watershed management and biodiversity conservation.

The Committee also approved the additional activities proposed for year 2002. These activities were

among the recommendations made during the Co-Directors' consultative visit to various management, research and training institutions in Europe during the first quarter of this year. Geared towards promoting and speeding up the transfer of knowledge, advanced technology and expertise that European scientists apply to conserve their biological resources, these activities also aim to encourage and improve collaboration between ASEAN and European biodiversity institutions.

The six new activities are:

- Development of an International Standard Reporting Procedure;
- Mapping Distribution of Plants in the ASEAN region;
- Biodiversity and Environment Policy Forum for ASEAN Senior Officials on Environment and Lawmakers;
- Development of Standards for Habitat Classification in the ASEAN region;
- Developing ASEAN Experts on Systematics;
- Study Tour to Europe by ASEAN Senior Officials for the Environment.

For the proposed study tour, Mr. Demetrio L. Ignacio, ASOEN-Philippines and DENR Undersecretary for Policy and Planning recommended that a reference, specifically an outline of all existing policies on biodiversity conservation be made for this particular activity. The tour aims to expose the ASOEN members to the policies, practices and related issues in biodiversity conservation in Europe.

On the inquiry of Mr. Effendy A. Sumardja, ASOEN Member from Indonesia, regarding the Guidelines

on Minimizing the Impact of Forest Fire on Biodiversity in ASEAN, the Committee was informed that the proceedings of the said workshop is currently being edited, after which it will be published and distributed to all participating countries. The workshop, which was conducted on 22-23 March 2001 in Brunei Darussalam, formulated the guidelines to provide managers, policy makers, among others on the directions in designing programs and policies that would address forest fire-related issues and problems in the region. National Biodiversity Reference Unit Country Coordinators and focal persons on forest fire and representatives from Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam attended the forest fire workshop.

The participation of the Kingdom of Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic to ARCBC's activities was also discussed by the Committee. The two countries formally joined ARCBC last 16 May and 8 June 2001, respectively.

The ASOEN Chair clarified that the Steering Committee shall continue to meet twice a year. He said that the meetings will be held back to back with either the annual meetings of the ASEAN Working Group on Nature Conservation (AWGNCB) or the Informal ASEAN Meetings of Ministers of Environment (IAMME) and annual ASOEN Meetings.

Hence for the year 2002, the 5th Meeting of the SC will be held back to back with either the 12th AWGNCB Meeting or 6th IAMME, while the 6th Steering Committee Meeting will be held together with the 13th ASOEN Meeting. ■