

COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS OF ARCBC AND OEPP

Information Management and Networking In Thailand

► **By DONALD GORDON and PRAOPAN TONGSOM**

The Office of Environment Policy and Planning (OEPP) was created in 1992 under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MOSTE) by virtue of the *Enhancement and Conservation of National Environmental Quality Act*. Its overall goal is to promote and facilitate activities that support the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources throughout Thailand by:

- Formulating strategic policy documents such as the Environmental Quality Management Plan and State of the Environment Reports;
- Conducting environmental impact assessments;
- Coordinating management of the Environmental Fund; and
- Serving as focal point to international conservation-related conventions and treaties such as the *Ramsar Convention on Wetlands* and the *Convention on Biological Diversity*.

The OEPP carries out its mandate through a number of Divisions and Regional Environmental Offices. The Natural Resources and Environmental Management Division in particular, directs the management and networking of biodiversity information to support conservation and sustainable use initiatives, which has been a long-standing priority of OEPP. Its activities have resulted in projects such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)-supported Biodiversity Data Management Project (BDM) and recent

initiatives aimed at developing metadatabases, the Thai Clearing House Mechanism, and harmonised reporting to international conventions through collaboration with organisations such as the ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation (ARCBC), which OEPP serves as the National Biodiversity Reference Unit (NBRU) for Thailand.

Biodiversity Data Management Project (BDM)

Thailand was one of ten countries involved in the Biodiversity Data Management Project (BDM) that was launched in the mid 1990s. This project was initiated to enhance biodiversity data management capacity of developing countries in support of implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity. In Thailand, outputs of the BDM project included:

- *A National Institutional Survey*. This survey aimed at identifying datasets held by organisations, as well as institutional capacity to handle and manage biodiversity information.
- *A Guideline on Biodiversity Data Management*. This Guideline was developed as a measure for improving the management and availability of biodiversity information, and includes the following major components:
 - Guideline on the Development of Efficiency in Biodiversity Data Management;
 - Establishment of a Biodiversity Information Network (BINET); and

- Biodiversity Data Management Standards (BDMS).
- *A Biodiversity Data Management Action Plan*. In promoting the management and exchange of biodiversity information, the *Action Plan* comprises four policies, 15 measures and 51 specific activities. Elements of the *Action Plan* have been incorporated into the *National Biodiversity Strategy*, approved by the Cabinet in 1997.

However, the downturn in the regional economy in the late 1990s has made the implementation of the Action Plan difficult. Nevertheless, there has been a continued and increasing need for biodiversity information to support decision-making and educational processes in addressing environmental problems, and in enabling Thailand to meet its obligations to several international conventions and programmes.

Collaboration between OEPP and ARCBC

Against this background, a number of priorities have been identified in the management and exchange of biodiversity information for Thailand. These have been summarised in a recent proposal by Chen Nan of OEPP to ARCBC and include the following:

- Continue the implementation of the BDM project, particularly revision of the institutional survey, and building institutional capacity to manage biodiversity information.
- Establish the Thai Clearing House Mechanism.

- Enhance institutional networking through mechanisms such as BINET.

Consequently, ARCBC and OEPP are collaborating on a number of activities to address these priorities. Progress in these areas is as follows.

Updating the National Institutional Survey. Survey forms on *Organisations, Datasets* and *Experts* were developed and sent to hundreds of institutions and organisations at both national and international levels during December 2001. This effort has resulted in more than 300 questionnaires being returned on *Organisations* and more than 200 forms being returned on each of the *Datasets* and the *Experts*. Results are being managed in a relational database and analysis should allow some interesting comparisons with the original BDM survey on trends and developments in information management and exchange. Stakeholder meetings have been instrumental in helping to determine the

design, analysis and outputs (e.g. report and on-line metadatabases) of the survey questionnaires.

Metadatabase Development. An important output of the institutional survey is the presentation of a web-based catalogue on *organisations, datasets* and *experts* involved with the conservation and management of biodiversity. This metadatabase, due to be released in the second half of 2002, will be linked to ARCBC *Interactive* and, where possible, other metadatabases dealing with wider environmental issues at national, regional and international levels. An extract from the metadatabase on *datasets* is illustrated in **Table 1**.

Clearing House Mechanism. Many countries have developed a Clearing House Mechanism to the *Convention on Biological Diversity*. Development of these Clearing House Mechanisms is intended to promote scientific and technical cooperation, and the exchange of information in support of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. In Thailand, presentation of

an on-line metadatabase and links to key datasets themselves will directly support goals of the Clearing House Mechanism in the following ways:

- Provide an invaluable information resource;
- Support and re-invigorate networks such as BINET;
- Present a platform for the further implementation of the Biodiversity Data Management Action Plan.
- Identify capacity building needs in partner institutions involved in the conservation and management of biodiversity, including initiatives such as harmonised reporting to the international conventions.

Bodies such as the Informal Advisory Committee to the CBD Clearing House Mechanism (CHM), as well as other national and regional CHM focal points are also being engaged to support the conceptual design and further development of the Thai Clearing House

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Mechanism – partnerships which could also facilitate the development of other national Clearing House mechanisms in ASEAN.

Harmonised Reporting to International Conventions. Internationally, an area of great interest is in developing mechanisms that simplify and streamline reporting requirements to international conventions. The UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) is currently involved in a pilot project to review different models of harmonised reporting, one of which is being developed in Indonesia. ARCBC is currently explor-

ing ways of providing regional support to this initiative that would allow extension and adaptation of appropriate models to other countries of the region. For example, an initial meeting of stakeholders in Thailand has been facilitated to consider key data holders in relation to the information requirements of the major conservation-related conventions. It is envisaged that further discussions will result in a model that addresses reporting needs in a Thai context.

Conclusion

Collaboration between ARCBC

and OEPP as the National Biodiversity Reference Unit, is aimed at building on past initiatives and exploring new areas in the management and networking of information. Sharing these experiences and disseminating ‘best practice’ information with other ASEAN partners is an important part of this collaboration. So too is the development of a wide range of partnerships that supports these important efforts. ■

Donald Gordon is an Information Management & Networking Consultant with ARCBC. Proapan Tongsom is an Environmental Official of OEPP.

Table 1: Information Extracted from the Metadatabase on Datasets

data_id	title_of_dataset	key_words	web_address	contact
131	Butterflies in Thailand	butterfly, identification	www.butterflysite.com	webmaster@butterflysite.com
55	Wetlands	wetlands, inventory, national		sirikb@yahoo.com
115	Lichens in Thailand	lichens, taxonomy, pollution		kansri@ram1.ru.ac.th
105	National Park Database	natural resources, national park	www.forest.go.th	02-5614292-716
116	Biodiversity of Marine Vertebrates	mammal, fish, mangrove		038-391671-3

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Australian Agency for International Development (AUSAID) Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) European Union-United Nations Development Programme (EU-UNDP) Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Finland Embassy GTZ International Center for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF) International Development Research Center (IDRC) International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs SEAMEO Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) World Bank World Wildlife Fund (WWF) 		
Academe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Melbourne University of the Philippines 		
Consulting Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agrisystems Ltd. Arcadis Euroconsult DHV GFA Terra Systems International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) 		
		Non-government Organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LTS International Ltd. Natural Resources International Ltd. (NRI) Winrock International FRR Ltd Coffey MPW Pty Ltd. Forest Industry Organization (FIO) Universal and Innovative Consulting Co. MADECOR Private Sector-NGO Partnership Haribon Foundation Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC) Philippine Association for Intercultural Development (PAFID) Partners International Philippines Business for Social Progress (PBSP) Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (PhilDHRRA) RPDEV SUCCESSOR NGO Consortia SUNGI Development Foundation Tanggal Kalikasan Upland NGO Assistance Committee (UNAC) Global Witness Birdlife International NGO Forum on Asian Development Bank
		Private Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Philippine Wood Producers Association Forest Law Office Asian Development Bank (ADB)