

The ASOEN: Learning from European Experiences

■ By Lauro S. Punzalan

Biodiversity conservation practices vary from one country to another; every state has its own unique biodiversity and a distinct way of protecting and maintaining it. On a regional basis, the ASEAN and the European Union (EU) have their own way of dealing with biodiversity conservation issues. It is important for both to increase their consciousness on the existing practices in biodiversity conservation in other parts of the world in order to learn and adapt relevant and appropriate practices and policies. This is a major concern of the ASEAN Senior Officials for the Environment (ASOEN), representing each member country.

The ASOEN, also acting as the Steering Committee (SC) of the ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation (ARCBC), coordinates and approves the project's work plans and reports. The members expressed their desire to learn from Europe's experience in developing and applying common policies to address regional biodiversity issues. Thus, a study tour to Europe for ASOEN members was conducted from 23-29 June 2002. This study tour is both appropriate and timely in its aim to further strengthen the conservation of biodiversity in the region.

The main objectives of the study tour were to:

- Familiarise the participants with the various practices of the EU member countries in the development and use of common policies to address biodiversity conservation and other environmental issues at

the regional, national and project levels.

- Observe some procedures in formulating and/or implementing policies, specifically on biodiversity conservation and other environmental issues; and
- Gain first-hand experience of the application of biodiversity conservation policy.

The study tour to Europe was participated in by the ASOEN and the ASEAN Working Group Chairmen and their representatives from

as Paris, France; Brussels, Belgium; the Hague, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

In Paris, the group visited the Paris National Museum of Natural History that was established on 10th June 1793. The museum is renowned for the brilliance of its teaching and research and collection that are being enriched every year through many scientific expeditions.

High-ranking officials at the French Ministry of Environment informed the group about the European decision-making process as



Briefing of the ASEAN Delegations by the French Ministry of Environment on the European decision applied to biodiversity and environment, Paris, France.

Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. Representatives from the ASEAN Secretariat and the executing agency (Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Philippines) of the project also joined the tour. The ASEAN Co-Director and some staff represented ARCBC.

The European Bureau for Conservation and Development (EBCD) based in Brussels, Belgium through its Director, Despina Symons facilitated the process of the study tour to several European countries such

applied to biodiversity and the environment and on the legislations in the protection of biodiversity. They also presented and discussed the position of France on the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). A representative from the French Nature's Directorate talked about French legislation in the protection of biodiversity and harmonisation of the European legislations in this field. The Ministry provided the ASOEN members a book entitled "Biodiversity in France: Action Programme for Fauna and Flora", and other materials.

At the European Commission in Brussels, resource persons from the Environment Directorate-General discussed environmental decision-making in the European Community and on the CBD in the EU. The Commission also provided some related documents and materials.

A member of the European Parliament, the Vice-President of the Environmental Committee also explained the position of the Parliament on biodiversity. On the other hand, the liaison officer and biodiversity coordinator of the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), a non-government organisation (NGO), discussed the role of NGOs in the implementation of legislations and policies on biodiversity and environmental protection and conservation.

In the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, the Director-General welcomed the group. Several ranking officials of the Ministry briefed the group on various topics such as the CBD, the implementation of the EU Habitats and Birds Directive and EU funding support mechanisms for biodiversity conservation.

The group visited the Waddensea RAMSAR site, an area of outstanding value and the largest European wetland, covering portions of the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark. The Director of the Department North, Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries briefed them about the Waddensea area and on the Dutch nature policy.

The Ministry provided copies of the book entitled "Nature for People, People for Nature", a policy document for nature, forest and landscape, biodiversity and the Netherlands, other government policy documents as well as other related documents and materials. ■

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Surfing the Web... of Life

Global Invasive Species Programme (<http://jasper.stanford.edu/gisp/>) aims to lay the groundwork to address invasive alien species in science, education, management and policy through collaborative international action. The site provides information on the goals and history of GISP, its partners, publications, as well as links to other organisations working on invasive alien species.

The **IUCN-The World Conservation Union Invasive Species Specialist Group** (<http://www.issg.org/>) aims to reduce threats to natural ecosystems and the native species they contain by increasing awareness of invasive alien species, and of ways to prevent, control or eradicate them. The ISSG is part of the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of the World Conservation Union (IUCN), and is a global group of 146 scientific and policy experts on invasive species from 41 countries. ISSG provides advice on threats from invasives and control or eradication methods to IUCN members, conservation practitioners, and policy-makers. The group's activities focus primarily on invasive species that cause biodiversity loss, with particular attention to those that threaten oceanic islands.

The Food and Agriculture Organization's **Database on Introductions of Aquatic Species (DIAS)** (<http://www.fao.org/waicent/faoinfo/fishery/statist/fisoft/dias/mainpage.htm>) was initiated in the early 1980's. It primarily considered only freshwater species of fish and formed the basis for the 1988 FAO Fisheries Technical Paper No. 294. The database has been expanded to include additional taxa, such as molluscs and crustaceans, and marine species. In the mid 1990's a questionnaire was sent to national experts to gather additional information on introductions and transfers of aquatic species in their countries. The database now contains about 3,150 records.

The **USGS Nonindigenous Aquatic Species website** (<http://nas.er.usgs.gov/>) is located at the Center for Aquatic Resource Studies, and has been established as a central repository for accurate and spatially referenced biogeographic accounts of nonindigenous aquatic species. The site

provides scientific reports, online/realtime queries, spatial data sets, regional contact lists, and general information. The data is available for use by biologists, interagency groups, and the general public.

The Baltic Sea area is known to host about 100 aquatic alien species from North America, Ponto-Caspian region, Southeast Asia and other parts of the world. In the same vein, the Baltic may also be a donor area, since its species may be exported over the environmental barriers to other geographical regions. To foster interregional cooperation in gathering and dissemination of information on alien species, the **Baltic Sea Alien Species Database** (<http://www.ku.lt/nemo/mainnemo.htm>) aims to a) provide a qualified reference system on alien species for the Baltic Sea area, available online for environmental managers, researchers, students and all concerned; b) update the information on the Baltic Sea alien species, their biology, vectors of introduction, spread, impacts on environment and economy through the online questionnaire involving the data flow from research institutions and responsible environmental authorities; c) encourage the exchange of data among different geographical regions and thereby to serve a node in the Global Information System for Invasive Species.

The **Center for Invasive Plant Management** (<http://weedcenter.org/>) represents a coalition of agencies, organisations, and individuals interested in managing invasive plants and maintaining healthy ecosystems in western North America. The Center's goals are to enhance land manager and public education, coordinate regional research, facilitate partnerships, increase multidisciplinary communication, and implement practical management programmes. The Center for Invasive Plant Management is designed to bridge education, communication, and research by promoting participation among diverse interests as regional, multidisciplinary proposals and programmes are developed and implemented. This team structure will ensure a broad view of long-term needs, a systematic approach to invasive plant issues, and the practical application of research results. ■