
Guidance and Review for the Workshop

November 2000

(Dr Douglas Taylor, International Science Coordinator, October 2000)

Introduction

Review of Progress

- Issue: Lack of resources for the work of Coordinators
- Issue: Lack of involvement with staff of Wetlands International
- Issue: Lack of forward plans from WI for SGs to engage with

Wetlands International's Strategic Positioning

- Background
- Relationships with Partners
- In the context of Conventions

Conclusions

Annex 1 Recommendations to Board of Members, 1998

Annex 2 Extract from Recommendations, presented to Board of Directors, April 2000

Introduction

This paper is the key guidance document for the Specialist Groups Workshop, held in Wageningen in November 2000. The Workshop brings together Specialist Group Coordinators, key staff and representatives of our Partner Organisations. It also hosts three parallel Workshops on behalf of the Ramsar Convention, on Threatened Waterbirds, Peatlands and on Wet Grasslands, that involve many of the participants with interests in Specialist Groups.

The purpose of the Workshop is to:	(supporting documents)
• Review progress made since the last Workshop in February 1998 and Senegal workshops in November 1998 (referring to Group Reports 1996-98)	Paper 1 Paper 2
• Test the work of Specialist Groups against the priorities of Wetlands International's <i>Strategic Positioning</i> , discussed in	Paper 3

Senegal and agreed by the Board of Directors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the linkages between SG work and the needs of Wetlands International's programmes and thematic areas of work. Identify gaps and further potential alliances 	Obtain from discussion Paper 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In collaboration with IUCN's Species Survival Commission and with Birdlife, agree the terms of reference under which the three organising Partners of the Waterbird Network wish to engage with these Specialist Groups 	Paper 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider how to improve Specialist Group working relationships with staff of Wetlands International, in particular the relationship between thematic Specialist Groups, programmes and projects 	Obtain from discussion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree a short term work plan outline for 2000 – 2001 for Specialist Groups, Wetlands International and Partners, and the next steps for review of future working 	Develop at Workshop

Expected outputs from the Workshop therefore include:

- a terms of reference for Specialist Group work with the three Partners;
- a short term work plan for Specialist Groups until the November 2001 Advisory Council;
- agreement between Partners on technical cooperation over Specialist Group work, data exchange and ongoing liaison and workplans.

Below, this paper looks at progress to date, some key issues, and the Strategic Positioning of the organisation, in order to provide context for the meeting, and to establish common ground.

Review of Progress

The Specialist Group network associated with Wetlands International consists of taxonomic and thematic groups of scientists. The taxonomic groups are all waterbird related and are shared with the IUCN Species Survival Commission, and with Birdlife. However, Wetlands International is considered by both partners to be the leader of this Waterbird Network. By contrast, the five thematic groups, dealing with inventory, water resources, restoration, economic assessment, education and public awareness are not shared with our partners, but certain members have cross membership with the Ramsar Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel.

Substantive reviews of Specialist Group roles were undertaken at several points in the life of Wetlands International, these are summarised in Table 1. The recent action lists from the reports are given in the Annexes, but key actions are summarised in the table. Most recently in April 2000, the global Board of Directors approved

a Specialist Group review paper. This paper is provided as **Paper 2**. The purpose of the paper was to follow up the agreed actions following the Senegal 1998 workshops, approved by the Board of Members (now Advisory Council).

Table 1. Summary of relevant reports on Specialist Groups

(Key outstanding issues are highlighted in bold in the table)

Date	Report	Key Actions proposed	Results achieved
December 1995	Strategy for the Development of the Wetlands International Specialist Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · WI structure · Full-time SG Liaison Officer · Small grants budget · Co-operation between SGs · Triennial plan of activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Vague result · Achieved in Sept1997 · Some money · Not achieved · Activated
October 1998	A Strategic Framework for Developing The International Waterfowl Census (IWC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Encourage SGs to become more pro-active in guiding data needs and analyses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Wader Study Group helps guide Wader Database work
November 1998	Developing WI's SG Network, report to Board of Members (now Advisory Council). Based on February 1998 Workshop outputs (see Annex 1 and Paper 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Publish Triennial reports · SG Liaison Officer Asst · SG Handbook · Email communication · Establish task forces · Develop Forward Plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Reports sent in to WI, but not published · Not yet appointed · Not produced · Achieved · Not achieved · Not achieved
April 2000	Review of issues relating to SGs, report to Board of Directors (with review of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Test SG work against WI strategic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · SGs not

	individual SGs attached as an annexe) See Annex 2 or the full Paper 2	Objectives · Review needs · Create Skills Register · Invite SGs to propose/run projects · Re-activate Bulletin · Promote task/team based work · Appoint more SG expertise to Advisory Councils and Board of Directors	consulted · Not achieved · WI Register active · SGs not consulted · Not achieved · For decision · Achieved in 2000
--	--	--	---

Most of the current suggestions made in the April 2000 paper (Paper 2), are not new, merely revisits of past reviews and discussions. The recurrent themes in correspondence with Specialist Groups include:

- Lack of resources for the work of Coordinators
- Lack of involvement with staff of Wetlands International
- Lack of forward plans from WI for SGs to engage with

On the positive side, some Specialist Group work has continued effectively through the International Waterbird Census and associated work, inventory projects and several publications have been produced in 1999 and 2000 by, or in collaboration with Groups.

Recent decisions of the governance bodies (Board of Directors, Advisory Councils), have provided more seats to Specialist Group members, and this newly strengthened position of Specialist Groups in the governance of Wetlands International will result in increased influence on global strategy and business plans of the organisation. With the new structure now in place, the three Regional Advisory Councils each appoint two Specialist Group representatives, feeding one into the global Board of Directors, which consists of the Chair of each Regional Council, three Specialist Group representatives and the President of Wetlands International as Chair of the Board.

The three main issues listed above are briefly discussed below, however, further issues will be identified at the Workshop through examination of the results of a new SWOT analysis at the Workshop.

Issue: Lack of resources for the work of Coordinators

In common with the IUCN-SSC, Wetlands International does not have an adequate budget to pay for the

scientific work of the Specialist Groups. Instead, small amounts are made available to assist the work of the Coordinators of the Groups, aimed at:

- Managing membership lists, communications, and organisation of the triennial work plans of Specialist Groups
- Attending meetings of Wetlands International's scientific and governance meetings
- Responding to requests for information, collaboration or inputs to coordination of projects

In principle, the work undertaken by Groups should reflect the motivation of their members. It is believed that most Group members undertake work either as part of their normal day jobs, or in their spare time, driven by personal interest and commitment to the work. One Group in particular, the Wader Study Group charges membership fees and funds the running of the Group through their own resources. The International Co-ordination Unit of Wetlands International has established a budget line for Specialist Group support, but has not formally agreed with Groups, precisely what is or is not eligible.

Issue: Lack of involvement with staff of Wetlands International

Specialist Groups formerly provided the majority of the scientific material, activities and outputs of the former IWRB, when staff were more closely associated with the work of Groups. Since the formation of Wetlands International, the regional business plans and project development cycle have gradually diversified away from the work of Specialist Groups. Staff of the organisation therefore may have much less understanding, involvement and interest in the work of Specialist Groups. This situation has also partly resulted from the lack of a global approach to the work of Wetlands International, and the failure of the regions to build into their workplans, the cooperative working envisaged by the Strategic Positioning that was agreed by the Board of Members in 1998. In addition, Paper 2 suggests that Specialist Group members may be able to join the proposed Skills Register as associates, therefore making themselves more easily identifiable as candidates for project work at an individual level.

Issue: Lack of forward plans from WI for SGs to engage with

The lack of forward plans at a global level is reflected in the lack of effective coordination of elements of the regional business plans that might relate to Specialist Group work. This vacuum is being addressed within Wetlands International, however, this renewed programmatic approach will take up to a year to formulate and implement. It is envisaged that staff focal points for the main technical areas of our work will be identified and supported, so that wider ownership of the forward plans will be translated into projects that involve Specialist Groups more effectively. Some ideas for this involvement are set out in Paper 2

Wetlands International's Strategic Positioning

Background

As agreed within several workshops held in Dakar, Senegal in 1998, Wetlands International developed a seven

point list of Strategic Objectives (originally called "Organisational Objectives"), and further developed these through four thematic areas which are:

1. Inventory, assessment & monitoring: providing sound baselines data & information;
2. Enhancing the wise use of wetlands & their resources through management & training;
3. Managing wetlands and their resources in the context of global environmental issues; and
4. Assisting conventions, governments and other decision-makers to manage their wetlands and wetland resources.

More details of these and more specific definitions of issues and actions are given in the Wetlands International Strategic Positioning paper, see – **Paper 3**. The purpose of this positioning exercise was:

- internally to ensure that work included in regional and global Business Plans is consistent with the organisation's position in delivering wetland conservation; and
- externally as the basis of public statements and profiling of what Wetlands International does.

For Specialist Groups, both of these purposes apply and Co-ordinators should be aware of both the opportunities and constraints that this Positioning implies for the work of Groups.

Relationships with Partners

The IUCN Species Survival Commission and Birdlife International share the Waterbird Network with Wetlands International. Both partners therefore share an historical understanding of the value of these Specialist Groups, but each partner's agenda for engagement with Specialist Groups is believed to differ substantively. Wetlands International's thematic Specialist Groups are, however, not directly shared with these partner organisations.

In respect of the Waterbird Network, Wetlands International engages with it in two ways:

- Through the International Waterbird Census and Waterbird Population Estimates, steered by the Waterbird Steering Committee. This work is associated with four separate databases, holding historical species counts
- With individual Groups in conferences or specific single species projects

The IUCN Species Survival Commission deals with the Waterbird Network via individual Groups, but treats each Group as a member of a much wider family of Groups (more than 100) in the SSC. IUCN is believed to be particularly interested in ensuring that data obtained by its associated groups conforms to the *Species Information Service* standards.

Birdlife manages an entirely different network of volunteers in its IBA monitoring work, but shares interests in the Waterbird Network. The principal focus of Birdlife work at present is the identification and conservation of IBAs, and implementation of action plans for threatened birds, with associated specialists, many of whom overlap with

the Waterbird Network.

Potential or missing partners are also not to be forgotten. The existing Waterbird Network is a subset of the world expertise on waterbirds, for example the North America based Waterbird Society and the Society of Wetland Scientists are excellent examples of the wider network, which should be engaged with effectively, perhaps initially via MoUs, and then through specific projects under thematic programmes.

In the context of Conventions

Wetlands International values its relationship with its International Partners, especially in the context of its work for the Ramsar Convention, where Wetlands International, Birdlife International, IUCN, WWF International are the Convention's International Organisation Partners. This relationship is regularly assessed by the Convention and each Partner is encouraged to contribute a Joint Work Plan towards the work of that Convention. Wetlands International contributed a Plan in 1999, and intends to complete an update later in 2000. The potential work of Specialist Groups is cited where appropriate in this Plan.

The Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) is the other Convention with which Wetlands International has a long history of cooperation and practical activities. The Africa Eurasia Waterbird Agreement provides the main framework. Within the AEWA framework, the Goose SG has responsibility for the Brent Goose Management Plan under the AEWA, while the Wader Study Group deals with the Wader Atlas work. The specific linkage between wetland site management and the fate of migratory birds has long been recognised and the AEWA GEF pilot project, managed by Wetlands International has identified several sites in a network involving local partners and stakeholders, and aims to promote wise use of the sites in support of the flyways.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) takes an ecosystem approach to conservation of biodiversity. Wetlands International, which has recently signed an MoU with the CBD, undertakes to adhere to this approach, however, the Waterbird Network has not historically worked within this remit. The monitoring techniques used by volunteers have not systematically recorded habitat condition or spatial relationships, therefore substantial changes to field protocols would be needed to provide greater value to the work of the Network. By contrast the thematic Specialist Groups have much more of a role to play at present within the ecosystem approach.

The other Conventions that are now engaged with directly include the Climate Change Convention, Convention on Desertification, however, Specialist Groups are not involved in a systematic manner with Wetlands International in respect of these Conventions.

Conclusions

This review has shown that in a number of respects, Wetlands International has a long way to go to fulfil the potential of its relationship with Specialist Groups. In particular, the technical relationship is particularly disappointing, with many staff unable to engage with Specialist Groups, which appear irrelevant to some areas of their work. In some areas, as briefly discussed, a good working relationship between the species groups and staff exists for the IWC, while the inventory and assessment working relationships are cordial. In addition, the newly strengthened position of Specialist Groups in the governance of Wetlands International has the potential to engage staff more actively with the work of Groups and *vice versa*.

For this Workshop, bringing together Specialist Groups, staff and key Partners, the challenge is to develop common purposes that look ahead and hopefully provide an exciting platform for future work to be done in partnership by staff and Specialist Groups, funded programmatically and fully guided by the agreed strategic objectives and positioning of Wetlands International.

The specific objectives for the meeting, as outlined in the Introduction, are to first learn lessons from the previous reviews and reports relating to Specialist Groups and bring forward outstanding actions for attention. Next is the need to check that Specialist Groups and staff of Wetlands International understand the extent to which the work of Groups fulfils the needs of programmes and projects, and identify gaps and options for strengthening Specialist Groups or engaging other partners.

Our International Partners, especially Birdlife and IUCN-SSC are invited to state how they wish to engage with Specialist Groups, and to what extent Groups can expect recognition and support from them, and in return, what these Partners expect from Groups.

Finally, the Workshop should draw up a forward plan, with the help of staff, to provide a prototype framework for Specialist Groups to plan within, to identify resources and working arrangements that are required, and improved communications to enable longer term plans to be developed, and hopefully a better relationship to be achieved.

Annex 1

Recommendations made to the Board of Members, November 1998

1. SUMMARY

This paper:

- summarises the current role, importance and network structure of Wetlands International's Specialist Groups;
- describes progress in implementing the 1995 Specialist Groups Development Strategy, approved by the Board of Members in 1995, and particularly since the appointment in September 1997 of Dr Nick Davidson on a two-year secondment as Science Co-ordinator in the International Co-ordination Unit, with global responsibility for Specialist Groups development.
- assesses the current strengths and weaknesses of the current network; and
- makes 15 recommendations for endorsement by the Board of Members for future priorities for maintaining and developing the Specialist Group network in its key role of supporting Wetlands International's scientific and technical activities.
- recommendations are as follows:

1. Essential activities that must be undertaken as top priority by all groups should be a). the establishment, regular maintenance and accessibility to the group's expert network; and b). development of an agreed triennial forward plan, and annual reporting on achievement of plan targets.

2. Priority activities in the next triennium are for all groups (unless otherwise agreed) to move to a global plus regional assistant co-ordinator structure; to involve other assistant co-ordinators to undertake specific group management tasks, and to encourage changes in lead co-ordinators on a regular (e.g. 6 year) basis.

3. The International Co-ordination Unit should give priority to establishing for budget lines for SG network support and small grants, either from allocation of core funds and/or through sponsorship of network activities. Financial support from regional licencees for the development of regional SG activities should be maintained (Africa, Europe, Middle East) or developed (Americas, Asia-Pacific) as resources permit.

4. A seconded or funded ICU post of Specialist Groups Network Assistant should be sought.
5. The ICU should develop a Specialist Groups' Handbook to provide guidance to those co-ordinating the network.
6. Priority should be afforded by both the ICU and Specialist Groups themselves to establishing electronic communications networks, both internal and external.
7. Specialist Groups should be encouraged to examine options for developing as fee-paying membership networks.
8. In developing the network in the light of the establishment of global strategic framework for Wetlands International, priority for network development should be given to establishing links with existing independent groups, and establishing task forces and working groups as needed.
9. Continue to explore mechanisms for establishing formal links with the Society of Wetland Scientists and the Colonial Waterbirds Society.
10. Rename the Wetlands, River Basins & Water Resources SG as the Wetlands & Water Resources SG.
11. Dissolve the Waterfowl Ecology SG.
12. Suspend the Hunting SG.
13. Create the Rail SG.
14. Endorse appointment of Specialist Group Co-ordinators listed in Annex 4 to the Board of Members for the 1999-2001 triennium; and record thanks to those stepping down for their work for Wetlands International.
15. Endorse continued evaluation of opportunities for restructuring existing Specialist Groups, including Economic Valuation, Herons, and Storks, Ibises and Spoonbills groups.

Annex 1 continued Approved Minutes of the Board of Members

10. Specialist Group Developments

Progress by the Science Co-ordinator on the implementation and development of the Specialist Group Strategy was described by the Board of Directors' Specialist Groups representative.

There had been substantial progress on developing the network since the appointment of the Science Co-ordinator. It was clear, however, that developing the SG network and supporting its activities was a full-time task (as identified by the 1995 Board meeting) and that the breadth of the Science Co-ordinator's role does not permit a full focus upon the SG network. It remained important that funding be found for supporting SG activities, and the lack of this was preventing full implementation of the Strategy – such resources should, where possible, come from core funding.

There remained a number of weaknesses in the network, with some groups and/or co-ordinators being largely inactive, but in part this has been due to lack of central contact and support for groups. There is considerable scope for expanding the network to cover priority work areas, particularly through links with other groups, and establishing task forces.

Brief presentations were made by the Co-ordinators of five Specialist Groups to provide a flavour of the wealth of activity and outputs recently achieved by the network.

- The Heron Specialist Group described how it is continuing to synthesise information and knowledge from its network worldwide and is using this to complete publication of a global review of the ecology and status of herons and a conservation action plan for herons.
- The Wader Study Group described work in completing major volumes in its *International Wader Studies* series, including a 500-page volume on wader flyway Eurasian-African flyways based on a major conference in Odessa. This has required more than

three person-years of volunteer time in producing, and makes a major contribution to knowledge of these species that helps to underpin implementation of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement.

- The Wetland Inventory & Assessment Group is leading completion for the Ramsar Convention of a major Global Review of Wetland Resources, which is assessing national wetland inventories worldwide to establish, as far as practicable, the size of the global wetland resource and to make recommendations for future wetland inventory designed to improve this knowledge. This work is a particularly good example of close working between Wetlands International staff in both the ICU and all three regions and the Specialist Group network in supporting global conventions.
- The protection afforded to wetlands through the Ramsar Convention is very important but it is recognised that coverage of globally threatened waterbirds by the Ramsar site network is very patchy. The Threatened Waterfowl Specialist Group has undertaken an initial review of Ramsar coverage for threatened Anatidae (ducks, geese & swans) and is now developing a joint project with all waterbird Specialist Groups and BirdLife International to assess current coverage in Ramsar sites and to make recommendations for improvements.
- The Wetlands & Water Resource Specialist Group has been the lead for Wetlands International in developing its approach to water resource management issues, initially through its involvement in an international symposium on Wetlands & Climate Change, and now developing workshops on wetlands and water resources, and sustainable tourism in wetlands.

It was agreed that the co-ordination between the SG networks and the ICU had improved and that re-organisation of the network needed to be managed centrally. Stronger linkages now needed developing with regional staff, and there should be more early consultation with Specialist Groups on major issues and on project development. A new format for triennial reporting had been developed and full triennial reports would be prepared and circulated subsequent to this meeting.

The 15 recommendations for priorities for future Specialist Group network development were endorsed, subject to confirmation of funding for the Science Co-ordinator post which was essential for the implementation of some recommendations. Changes to network structure included the renaming of the Wetlands, River Basins & Water Resources Management SG to the Wetlands & Water Resource SG; the dissolution of the Waterfowl Ecology SG; the suspension of the Hunting Specialist Group to permit re-evaluation of its role, priorities and future directions by a working group; and the creation of a Rail SG.

The re-appointment of 27 Specialist Group Co-ordinators was endorsed. Six Co-ordinators were stepping down at the end of the triennium and the Board of Members recorded its thanks to these Co-ordinators for the hard work and excellent service helping to develop and maintain the vital SG network on behalf of Wetlands International.

Action: Science Co-ordinator to edit and circulate the 1995-98 Specialist Group Triennial Reports and Forward Plans

Annex 2

Extract from the Recommendations made to Board of Directors, April 2000

Suggested key actions

Some existing Groups are clearly dysfunctional. Probable reasons for this are varied and include: no natural network; someone with inappropriate skills acting as Co-ordinator; long-standing Co-ordinators becoming over-stretched and needing active assistance; lack of Group committee structure to spread the task load from the Co-ordinator. Much improved communication will be necessary to identify appropriate actions in each case.

The performance and commitment of Groups is variable, ranging from excellent to very poor. Suggested corrective actions are noted in the individual topic sections above, while priority actions are identified below.

It is important to note that while the commitment to Specialist Groups remains strong, it is recognised by Wetlands International's International Co-ordination Unit that not enough attention has been paid to Groups, neither has enough support and feedback been offered to them. This paper suggests a way forward to improve

working relationships and to renew commitment with Specialist Groups.

Priority actions are to:

- Re-map the expertise and interests of Specialist Groups against Wetlands International Strategic Objectives
- Solicit directly the views of Specialist Group Co-ordinators on their needs, and to test their responsibilities.
- Use the November 2000 Scientific Staff and Specialist Groups Meeting to obtain well-structured reviews of issues and needs.
- Identify key gaps in coverage of issues or taxa, or redundancy of coverage
- Invite Specialist Groups to contribute towards the register of skills expertise
- Invite Specialist Groups, via a simple guidance note, to propose project ideas to be developed.
- Screen potential projects for those suitable as contracts for Specialist Group delivery
- Re-activate the Specialist Group Bulletin produced by the ICU, and other more frequent communications, to strengthen dissemination and feedback
- Encourage task and team-based working to encourage Specialist Groups to collaborate with Wetlands International staff and with each other.
- Improve staff understanding of the role and potential for use of Specialist Groups
- Appoint additional technical expertise to the Advisory Council on topics reflecting Strategic Positioning needs

© 2001 Wetlands International - ICU.

This is the Web site of Wetlands International and is maintained from our Headquarters in Wageningen, The Netherlands.

Material from these pages may be reproduced freely for educational, journalistic, and other non-commercial purposes. Please email any comments or suggestions for improvement to this prototype website to:

Douglas Taylor@wetlands.agro.nl