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NGOs Gain Momentum within TC 207

Group Seeks Ways to Enhance Funding, Global Involvement

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia—Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) within Technical Committee 207 took a positive step forward here July 1-8, meeting formally for the first time to find ways to enhance NGO participation in the ISO 14000 standards development process. More than 40 NGOs and other TC 207 experts from 12 countries and four liaison organizations participated in the newly formed NGO Task Group, which TC 207 established in December after evaluating diminishing NGO participation in recent years. The group will report to the full TC 207 on all matters concerning NGOs and has two years to address three issues with specific deliverables. They are:

1. **Addressing resource impediments to effective NGO participation:** *Deliverable*—Provide advice on the development of mechanisms that obtain and sustain funding to support NGO participation in the work of TC 207 at the national and international levels. Funding administration and the mechanism to collect funds will be implemented by the NGO community, not by the TC 207 NGO Task Group or by TC 207 itself.
2. **Addressing structural/procedural limitations to effective NGO participation:** *Deliverable*—Develop a paper that identifies whether the procedures and practices of ISO and TC 207 enable or limit effective NGO participation. This paper should seek to identify best practices and serve as the group's report to TC 207.
3. **Establishing an interface with the broader NGO community and enhancing communication, education and coordination within the NGO community (both internal and external to TC 207) on the work of TC 207.** *Deliverable*—Develop an informational product on the work of TC 207 with accompanying text regarding the NGO perspective and concerns about the work of TC 207. Also, outreach will take place in the form of Web site content and workshop seminars targeted for an NGO audience.

Although the NGO Task Group has a limited scope and no voting power within TC 207, the group's chairman, Jason Morrison of the Pacific Institute, told *IESU* that NGOs felt progress was on the horizon and that the

“tenor of the discussions has moved from adversarial to constructive” on the deliverables at hand.

“It seems that in past meetings, there has been a lot of tension in the discussions concerning what NGOs were trying to achieve with their agenda,” Morrison said. “We’ve now set that agenda, and the people that participated were quite productive and constructive; those people who weren’t participating were content with what took place.”

Morrison said the group’s future success would hinge on participants staying focused on the three deliverables, and that as the task group’s leader, he would ensure that members of each of the three subgroups would keep that in mind as they move forward. He added that other issues will “definitely come up” as NGOs progress, but the scope of the group will remain rigid. “We want to get real answers and not just make assumptions as to why NGOs choose not to participate,” Morrison said. “We’ll be finding out many of those reasons and then hopefully form some long-term responses to shape future participation in this important process.”

Indeed, the ISO 14000-development process is still important to many NGOs, including Morrison’s Pacific Institute, which believes that if groups such as ISO continue to develop standards that affect environmental policy worldwide, then they must have the appropriate representation from the stakeholders that are affected by such standards. Morrison stressed that such credibility is more crucial today than ever, as TC 207 begins the process of developing standards on issues such as environmental communications and climate change.

“I think that’s the sense and a common goal of this group,” Morrison said. “I believe a case can be made that if increased NGO representation were to come to fruition within TC 207, it would be to the benefit of all standards users and future public policy.”

Tom Rotherham, representing the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), agreed, adding that IISD’s interest and involvement in TC 207 is to promote more cooperation between the NGOs and TC 207 and create a forum where NGOs feel “comfortable communicating their interests and concerns.”

“In the past, the battle lines were always drawn,” Rotherham explained. “NGOs were not able to—or invited to—cooperate and collaborate with TC 207. From IISD’s perspective, this forum is an excellent step forward in the treatment of NGOs within TC 207 and hopefully can be the foundation in which stronger future work can be developed.”

Rotherham also noted that the most important issue for the NGO Task Group to address would be funding, which is more complex than merely

providing resources to attend meetings. He said that communication and outreach is just as significant to NGOs and—perhaps more important—to their donors. If the donor community doesn't see the relevance and NGOs can't communicate the relevance, he added, then NGO participation would dry up soon.

Other NGOs felt that although the task group held great promise for the future, the funding issue should be addressed sooner rather than later.

Randy Kritkauskay, president of Ecologia, said that his concern was now that NGOs were working inside the TC 207 process to produce documents to aid NGO participation, nothing would be complete for at least 18 months—further stalling NGO participation for the here and now.

“That’s a little disappointing, but perhaps that’s the process,” Kritkauskay said. “We have to see if there’s going to be long-term benefits, and that’s a giant question mark that everyone here must understand.

“I think it’s incumbent on NGOs to get together informally and see what we can do with our own resources in the immediate future to reach out to our NGO colleagues and to use some of our own funding resources to bring our colleagues here to participate,” Kritkauskay said. “That can be done immediately, and I think that’s something outside of this task group that we can do, and certainly something that our organization hopes to do.”

Still, although members of the NGO Task Group hope to make an immediate and long-term difference to enhance participation, some TC 207 members were slightly skeptical on how much progress the group would actually make.

Joe Cascio, chairman of the U.S. Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and a participant of the NGO Task Group, said he truly hopes that “this [will be] the vehicle to bring more NGOs to the table,” but stressed that the ultimate objective will be difficult to achieve.

“That group is on track, and I’m very satisfied with their work,” Cascio told *IESU*. “It’s the right thing to do.

“But the truth of the matter is, this group will not have a vote or a voice in TC 207,” Cascio continued. “Even if they did have a vote, they always would be outvoted where the votes make a difference. I wish them well, and I hope they do some constructive stuff, but I’m relatively pessimistic about the whole thing.”

Morrison disagreed.

“I think what we’re doing is a real opportunity for TC 207,” he said. “We’re here to give strategic advice to the TC on mechanisms to improve NGO involvement, but some of the activities that will take place from what the task group learns will occur outside the rubric of ISO and could be

implemented inside national bodies. There's a lot of hope that [this] might take place."

The next NGO Task Group meeting will be in South Africa in June 2002. In the meantime, three subgroups will address the three deliverables charged to the group for action by e-mails and conference calls.

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