

This article first appeared in the July 2002 issue of *International Environmental Systems Update*. For more information, please visit this Web site: www.ceem.com.

***IESU* Leadership Spotlight**

Jason Morrison, Chairman of ISO Technical Committee 207 NGO Task Group

To keep readers more current with the issues surrounding environmental management, *IESU* created a Question-and-Answer series involving leaders from industry, government and related organizations. This month, the spotlight falls on Jason Morrison, Chairman of the recently formed NGO Task Group within the Technical Committee 207 (TC 207) on the ISO 14000 series of standards in the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

Morrison is a senior research associate at the Pacific Institute for Studies in Development, Environment, and Security, an independent, nonprofit center created in 1987 to conduct research and policy analysis in the areas of environment, sustainable development, and international security. He heads the Institute's Trade, Economic Globalization, and Environment program, and is currently directing research on the policy implications of the ISO 14000 standards. He has co-authored numerous publications on the subject, including *Managing a Better Environment: Opportunities and Obstacles for ISO 14001 in Public Policy and Commerce*, which was released in March 2000. He also works on issues relating to water and sustainability in the Colorado River border region.

Since 1997, Morrison is a member of the U.S. Technical Advisory Group (and U.S. delegate) to TC 207. He was a founding member of the NGO Working Group on ISO 14000, and is currently Chair of the ISO/TC 207 NGO Task Group. He is a coordinating committee member of the Multi-State Working Group on EMSs, a coalition of state and federal agencies investigating the use of environmental management systems in regulatory innovation. He sits on the EMS Advisory Council for NSF International Strategic Registrations, Ltd. and is an Advisory Committee member of the National Biosolids Partnership—Environmental Management Systems Initiative. Morrison holds a Bachelor's Degree in philosophy from the University of California, San Diego and a Master's degree from Boston University's Center for Energy and Environmental Studies. He was a fellow in the Americans and World Affairs Fellowship Program in Berkeley, California.

IESU: One reason why the NGO Contact Group was formed in 1998 and why the NGO Task Group was created in December 2000 was to formalize the mechanism by which NGOs could register their opinions on issues facing TC 207. After the group's meeting in Johannesburg last month, how would you characterize the group's progress toward its goals of increasing NGO influence within the technical committee?

Morrison: It would have to say that it's still early days, but we're on the right track. Rome wasn't built in a day and likewise ISO won't reform overnight. With that said, there has been some significant changes to date, even if only in the realm of perception. For instance, there seems to be a growing comfort level with the whole notion of NGO participation in TC 207. It wasn't too long ago when there were quite a few who seemingly perceived of NGOs as two-headed monsters with horns. Now there seems to be an increasing number that realize that NGOs can come to the table to discuss issues in a rational manner.

That's not to say there aren't those that still appear to be stuck in a regressive mindset emblematic of the 1980s in terms of NGO involvement in multistakeholder processes. But the overall trend within TC 207 is positive, and those few NGO antagonists are losing ground. Ironically, events in Johannesburg showed that they're the ones that are now coming across as radical and irrational in the eyes of the majority of TC 207 members.

IESU: The level of support that NGOs have been afforded by TC 207 overall and various delegations in particular has not always been consistent. Have you seen any changes in the degree to which the leadership within the group has embraced NGOs and their input into the standards development process?

Morrison: In terms of financial support from TC 207 (or ISO Central Secretariat for that matter), there has been none to date. I would characterize the support as coming from a handful of progressive thinkers within the TC 207 leadership that have been champions of more equitable NGO representation.

Measurable change has been slow to come about, but to be fair, NGOs within TC 207 have not done well to articulate the desired changes. Besides

the requests to form the NGO Task Group, itself, and to have NGO representation on the TC 207 Chairman's Advisory Group two years ago, we haven't asked for many specific things. One of the current NGO Task Group's work products is meant to address this. We're producing a discussion paper on the various limitations to effective NGO involvement in the work of TC 207, and it will include recommendations for specific changes that NGOs see as being needed.

IESU: By the same token, there has been a withdrawal of support from major NGO groups like the World Wildlife Federation and others who found the price of participating in TC 207 too expensive compared to the relative lack of support given by the committee's leadership. In Johannesburg, there were less than ten NGOs represented at the Task Force sessions. How did this affect the group's work ethic, and how do you think the group can reverse this trend and recruit other NGOs to get involved?

Morrison: Yes, it's true there's been a bit of backsliding in terms of NGO participation in TC 207. The loss of WWF International, in my view, was monumental, as they're one of the biggest environmental NGOs in the world. And even for those few NGOs that were able to be in Johannesburg, funding wasn't secured until the last minute. Continuity in these meetings is essential if there's going to be any lasting change in TC 207, yet funding for NGOs remains tenuous and on a meeting-to-meeting basis at that.

The reality is that, even if it's only informal, NGOs make a cost-benefit analysis as to whether the outcomes can justify the amount of resources spent. If it takes hundreds of thousands of dollars to participate in a three-year standards development process in which you have little or no influence, then you're likely to apply your resources elsewhere. It is for that reason that structures and processes need to be put in place (at both the TC 207 and national member body levels) so that NGOs and others are ensured that minority views are not completely obscured.

Over the last decade, most NGOs have already considered the costs and benefits of participating in TC 207 and decided against it based on the perception that there is little ability to influence outcomes. Thus, something needs to change within ISO or TC 207 to get them to reconsider them to reconsider their involvement. The new areas of standards work, such as climate change could also serve as an impetus for their reconsidering their involvement.

In order to have a real chance of getting NGOs interested in TC 207, I believe there needs to be a formal and public expression of interest by the TC 207 leadership that they want NGOs there, accompanied by at least a few reform measures (even if superficial) that illustrate that the commitment is in fact genuine.

IESU: One point that has been raised to support NGO participation in TC 207's activities is that such representation will benefit standards users and those responsible for developing public policy. As chairman of the NGO Task Group, what deliverables have been established to address this and how do you foresee the work of this group contributing to the realization of those goals?

Morrison: I have long held that NGOs hold the key to the acceptance ISO standards in the marketplace. If NGOs support and are involved in the development of ISO 14000 standards, they will advocate their use in policy and will be more likely to publicly applaud companies that adopt them. Clearly, broader applicability of the standards and enhanced public image are of benefit to ISO 14000 users. Thus, getting NGO support of the final standards, made possible by NGOs participating and becoming vested during their development, behooves businesses over the long-term.

Conversely, imagine a scenario where the last few remaining NGOs dropped out of TC 207 at the same time that TC 207 considers broadening its mandate to include issues pertaining to sustainable development. In the 21st century, even the idea of an industry-dominated body developing standards relating to sustainable development without a meaningful representation from government and NGOs, frankly, doesn't pass the laugh test.

As for the role of the NGO Task Group and the value of its deliverables, we're working to make it easier for NGOs to understand how the arcane ISO standards development works, how to get involved, and how to be most effective. On a longer-term scale, we're also trying to identify the various obstacles to effective NGO participation in TC 207 and to recommend remedies that increase NGOs' ability to be heard and influence the process. To the degree to which we come up with viable solutions for procedural and structural reform, we stand a higher likelihood of drawing NGOs into the fold.