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Meeting of the Parties to the Convention
on Environmental Impact Assessment
in a Transboundary Context
Second meeting
(Sofia, 26-27 February 2001)
(Item 4 (vii) of the provisional agenda)

DRAFT DECISION TO BE TAKEN AT THE SECOND MEETING OF THE PARTIES
Submitted by the Working Group

**DECISION II/7
THE NETWORKING FACILITY ATTACHED TO THE DATABASE
ON ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

The Meeting.

Recognizing that interactive communication among Parties and Non-Parties will contribute towards the full application of the provisions of the Convention,

Also recognizing the opportunities, the ease and cost-effectiveness offered to this end by the Internet,

1. Welcomes the setting-up of the networking facility attached to the database on environmental impact assessment, adding to it a new interactive feature, allowing for the exchange of ideas (discussion forum) and facilitating the dissemination of information by both E-mail and the use of an electronic bulletin board;

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2. Encourages Parties, non-Parties and all other stakeholders to use the networking facility;
3. Endorses the document annexed below, which explains the interactive features of the networking facility and how it may be used.

Annex

NETWORKING FACILITY ATTACHED TO THE DATABASE ON ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Introduction

1. The implementation of the Espoo Convention relies on contacts at the bilateral and multilateral level. Cooperation between the Parties, necessary to achieve the goals set out in the Convention, would in fact not be possible without such interactions.
2. These interactions are of a multiple nature: through meetings, by letter, by telephone, by fax, etc. Recent years have seen the emergence of a new medium: the Internet has provided many of us with a new means of contact. It has facilitated contact from one individual to another. At the same time it has provided a new means to share information among many recipients. The Internet has generally proven to be fast, reliable and inexpensive.
3. Aware of the new opportunities offered by the Internet, Parties, at their first meeting, decided to establish a networking facility to take full advantage of the Internet and facilitate the exchange of information among the Espoo community.
4. The project and its implementation are based on a proposal by Finland and Switzerland and are funded by Switzerland (Swiss Agency for the Environment, Forests and Landscape) as the lead country. Project design and implementation are executed under the guidance of the Polish Ministry of Environment, Department of Environmental Protection.

I. GENERAL CONTENT

5. The networking facility is intended to be a communication tool for the entire Espoo community. It consists on the one hand of a discussion forum in the EnImpAs database which is accessible to anyone. On the other it offers specific services and communication tools to authorized users of the EnImpAs database. Authorized users are: the Focal Points, the Country Data Managers and other persons appointed by the Focal Points in each country (Parties and Signatories). Selected functions of the networking facility will be accessible to these authorized users only after they log on to the authorized (restricted) part of EnImpAs.
6. The basic components of the networking facility are:
 - (a) A discussion forum via World Wide Web pages (both for the Espoo community at large and for those having access to the authorized (restricted) part of EnImpAs);
 - (b) E-mail message distribution lists, possibly to be considered for a future upgrade of the networking facility;
 - (c) An announcement board for authorized users.

II. COMPONENTS OF THE NETWORKING FACILITY

A. Discussion forum via World Wide Web pages

1. General access discussion forum

7. A general-access discussion forum will be created in the non-restricted area of the EnImpAs database. This forum will be available from the link to “General Information” and then “EIA forum”. Any user of the EnImpAs database can join the discussion group after his/her introduction to the system. The introduction procedure is the following:

- (a) A new user can join the forum after filling in the introduction form with, in particular, his/her e-mail address, a unique network name and a password;
- (b) The system checks the accuracy of the e-mail address as part of the procedure under subparagraph (a) above;
- (c) Once introduced to the networking facility, a user can (i) join an existing topic by sending his/her intervention; (ii) can create his/her own topic by filling in the proper form;
- (d) A discussion topic is defined by the following set of information:
 - Title of the topic;
 - Language(s) in which the discussion is conducted;
 - Introductory message.

2. Restricted discussion forum

8. A similar discussion forum will be created inside the restricted EnImpAs, which is accessible only to authorized users of EnImpAs. It will allow communication between groups of authorized users who are interested in a certain activity (e.g. gas main pipelines across the territory of several countries), a document (e.g. draft bilateral agreement), the organization of a joint meeting (e.g. a conference), etc.

9. Such a group of authorized users can, for instance, be a group put together for the evaluation of the EnImpAs database, or a group of people preparing a training course on EIA methodology. These persons may wish to communicate in a way that allows them to access/read a particular document, read up on past discussions, and enter their own interventions.

10. No special registration is necessary for authorized users – each one of them can participate in any topic of the forum. Each authorized user will be able to propose a new topic for discussion. The activity of the forum’s participants (including the opening of a new topic for discussion) will not be stored in the buffer; so each intervention will immediately be entered into the database and visible for other authorized users. A discussion topic is defined by the same set of information as described above in paragraph 7 (d).

11. Each discussion topic will have a folder of documents associated to it. A document in the folder may be a Microsoft-Word file, a graph, a drawing, a photograph, etc. Each document will be

inserted into the folder as an attachment to an individual user's intervention. Its insertion will require the filling in of a short form containing the file name and a brief description of its content.

12. All ongoing topics will be gathered on a separate main page of the discussion forum. References to the discussion topics will be arranged by the date they were started. A page containing references to past discussions will also be available in the forum.

13. A new intervention will appear at the bottom of the page containing the current discussion topic. Added messages will not be stored in the buffer, i.e. every new intervention will be immediately visible to all participants. Information about the new intervention will contain:

- Date of intervention;
- Author;
- Heading;
- Contents;
- Optional: attached document.

14. It will be possible to send a message containing information that a new intervention has been made or even quote its content and attachments. To this end, the users' e-mail message distribution lists (see below) will be used. This feature is optional and can be used if a sender wants to make sure that other people interested in the discussion topic will notice the intervention.

15. The database moderator can close the discussion topic if participants agree to do so. Discussion will also be closed if there are no new interventions for a sufficiently long period. A closed discussion will be transferred to the archives. Complete information on past discussions will be available to all authorized users of the EnImpAs database.

B. E-mail message distribution lists

16. E-mail message distribution lists make it possible to send messages to a predetermined set of recipients. The definition of a distribution list will contain:

- The name of the list;
- A short description of the list;
- A set of participants (subset of authorized users of the EnImpAs database).

17. Sending a message using a distribution list will be done with the help of a special form provided within the networking facility. Replying to messages received through the distribution lists that are addressed to all members of the distribution list will equally be done using the form provided. Messages sent through a distribution list will not be archived.

1. Predefined distribution lists

18. The networking facility will contain predefined distribution lists available to any authorized user. These will include:

- Country Data Managers of Parties – Signatories,
- Focal Points of Parties – Signatories,
- Points of Contact for Notification of Parties – Signatories,
- Database administrator and moderator.

19. The need for new predefined lists can be communicated to the administrator and/or moderator, who may then introduce new predefined lists.

2. Personal distribution lists

20. Every authorized user of the EnImpAs database will be able to create his/her own private distribution lists. These private distribution lists will be created from the lists of Parties/Signatories in such a way that clicking with a mouse on the country name will expand it to the list of the addresses available in this country. Clicking on the selected address will move it to the user's distribution list.

21. Personal distribution lists will be visible only to the user who created them.

C. Bulletin board for authorized users

22. Possibly to be considered for a future upgrade of the networking facility is the inclusion of a bulletin board for authorized users.

23. The bulletin board may contain announcements and documents provided for all authorized users. The board would have a tree-like structure of categories and sub-categories, e.g.:

- (a) Information by the secretariat of the Convention;
- (b) Meeting of a working group:
 - Documents;
 - Provisional agenda;
- (c) Announcements of the Bureau of the Convention.

24. A page of the announcement board would be identified by its category and sub-category name path, e.g. meeting of a working group > Provisional agenda.

25. Authorized users would also be able to propose information for specific pages of the bulletin board.

III. LOCATION OF THE NETWORKING FACILITY

26. At this time, the best way to implement the networking facility is to do so as a component of the EnImpAs database. The reasons for this choice are:

(a) The UN/ECE web site and the EnImpAs web site are the two sites providing information and access to documentation and allow for an exchange of information related to the Espoo Convention. This makes the EnImpAs web site attractive as the host site for the networking facility;

(b) EnImpAs already relies on a programmed database system and a variety of tools that would be necessary to implement the networking facility – this will reduce its implementation costs. To restrict particular areas of the EnImpAs database to authorized users, EnImpAs already contains a log-in mechanism – this will guarantee more security.