

## SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP 1C: ECOMESSAGE / INTERPOL AND THE POLICE

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### GOALS

- Assess the ways Ecomessage, to facilitate sharing of information about international environmental crimes, can foster improved enforcement coordination at the inter-agency and international levels, including the police.
- Provide participants with sufficient background on Ecomessage, so their organizations can participate in the international program at an inter-agency level.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

About fifteen participants with a variety of backgrounds and nationalities joined the workshop on the Ecomessage/Interpol Data Base. Two colleagues with dedicated expertise on the subject acted as moderators, Bill Clark of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority and Andrew Lauterback of US EPA. As an introduction for the discussions, the facilitators presented the background and the set-up of the Ecomessage system.

### 2 DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Ecomessage is one of the products initiated by Interpol's Environmental Crimes Committee. Interpol's role – in general – is to collect, compare and exchange information on international criminal activities. Connected to this function of Interpol, Ecomessage was developed by two working groups of the Environmental Crimes Committee, the Wildlife Crimes Working Group and the Pollution Crimes Working Group.

The objectives of Ecomessage are to enhance reporting and communication concerning criminal environmental offences between environmental law

enforcement professionals in different countries and to develop a database to determine trends and information with regard to environmental criminal activity. The data can be used for purpose of monitoring and analyzing environmental crime. Criminal intelligence analysis of Ecomessage data is presently the most promising technique for defining the size, composition, structure and dynamics of criminal syndicates involved in environmental crime. This information is critical to any campaign seeking to suppress this type of criminality.

The Ecomessage system ideally covers all essential information with regard to serious environmental crime having international ramifications. Such crimes are, for instance, wildlife smuggling, illegal transboundary shipment of waste, vessel pollution, and ODS smuggling.

Ecomessage is centrally repositied with the Interpol General Secretariat in Lyon, France. The information on environmental/ecocrime can be submitted to the system in an efficient and standardized way by means of a simple form. The system allows cross-referencing and dedicated extraction of data. Several organizations may submit data, e.g. police, agencies, ministries and NGOs. The entrance to the

Ecomessage facilities is, however, always through the Interpol's National Central Bureaus (NCB) in each participating country.

At the moment, some 800 Ecomessages have been submitted, most of those on wildlife crime. INECE and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) are currently working together with Interpol to stimulate an intensified use of Ecomessage. In connection to this, mailings have been sent to inform relevant stakeholders around the world about existence and potential of Ecomessage.

In the Workshop discussions, the current benefits and suggestions for improved usage of Ecomessage were addressed. The following notions were brought forward:

- Get the message out that Ecomessage exists and is having success. By this, the use of the system can be stimulated so that more data are gathered concerning environmental crime. Exchange of such data will help to further improve the international enforcement of the rules of law.
- Keep sending the message to Interpol and others that ecocrime is an important aspect. These crimes seriously threaten environmental quality, sustainability and health all over the world. So it can not be stressed enough that adequate enforcement actions have to be taken to protect the planet and its people. Since many of the environmental crimes have an international context and are not bound by national borders, the exchange of information between countries is crucial to tackle the problem. The Ecomessage facility within Interpol is therefore an important instrument that deserves full support and application.
- Keep the system simple and with low thresholds. This is of importance because potential users would be discouraged if the use of the system is made difficult. The easy approach of the system should therefore be maintained, e.g., by the use of simple entry form with a limited number of truly essential items.
- Care should be taken that the system is kept dedicated to the real major international environmental crime cases. If too many minor cases are fed into the database, the power of the instrument and the motivation to submit cases would be reduced.
- In order to retain sufficient support for working with Ecomessage, the backing of the responsible management in the contributing organizations should be sought and ascertained. If not, there is a serious risk that the use of the system would become too incidental and too dependent on the dedication of individual compliance and enforcement employees. One of the actions that therefore should be taken is that management is informed about the benefits Ecomessage does offer. Stories of success might help to get the message across here.
- It should be noted that a system like Ecomessage is for many countries in fact the first and only tool to obtain some data gathering of environmental crime at all. The accessibility and simplicity of the system is hence a very important aspect, since sophistication would hamper its use in such countries. In connection to this it is essential that due attention be paid to basic training and education in method and techniques of environmental data gathering.
- It should be realized that in some cases authorities that submit data to the system will not directly benefit from this input for their specific case. Nevertheless, it is crucial that data of important environmental crimes are continuously fed into Ecomessage. Only in that way, the result from monitoring and analysis of data can in the end serve everybody and facilitate better compliance and enforcement of the rule of law. In cases where there is a direct one-to-one result from the data entered into Ecomessage, it should be guaranteed that the workers in the field really get these results fed back to them for their specific case.

- The results from Ecomessage could also serve the purpose of building awareness and public and political pressure if used in a smart and communicative way. Good examples of this are reported from the Czech Republic. Another successful case reported was that a nongovernmental organization managed to get its expenditures refunded from an insurance company for the clean-up of an oil spill on the basis of data from the Ecomessage system.
- In an effort to stimulate the use of Ecomessage to report wildlife crime, the International Fund for Animal Welfare has budgeted a US\$30,000 award for the agency which submits the most significant Ecomessage of a Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species intersessional period. The Interpol Working Group on Wildlife Crime has established criteria for selecting the awardee, and plans to apply those criteria to various candidates at its upcoming meeting. The award will not be made as cash, but rather will be made as \$30,000 in law enforcement training and/or law enforcement equipment for the winning agency.

### 3 CONCLUSION

Ecomessage is a simple but powerful tool for reporting and communicating criminal environmental offenses of international character. The use of Ecomessage should be further promoted, as is currently being done in a joint effort by INECE, IFAW, and Interpol. The enforcement of the law will benefit from the data gathered, exchanged, and analyzed via Ecomessage.

For its effective operation, Ecomessage should be kept as a system that can be used without unnecessary thresholds. Provisions should be made that other organizations and communities with an affiliation to enforcement – apart from police forces – could easily contribute to and extract from Ecomessage.

By actively spreading stories of successful use of Ecomessage in fighting international eco-crime, the importance of enforcement of the law will be underlined. Communication about concrete environmental results that have been achieved thanks to Ecomessage is an essential instrument to stimulate public awareness and to build political pressure concerning environmental issues.