

## **Focus Groups meetings for the EUROPARC Membership Consultation Strategy**



The purpose of the meeting is to gain comments, ideas and suggestions for the future of the EUROPARC Federation, in order that it can better serve the needs of its members. Some may wish to criticise aspect of the current or past operations, this is acceptable up to a point, but please steer the discussion onto solutions and option not just critique. European Protected Areas deserve and need an effective representative body. This is a chance to consider how we might best work towards and within the parameters, we have.

Each focus group meeting should be held by two persons, managing the complete session. The meeting should be chaired / led by a council member/or other person nominated by EUROPARC. A second, section or directorate staff or other person nominated, will take notes and provide the summary of the discussion. Where section or staff cannot provide support (because of language) then we kindly ask the council member could to provide a member of staff.

Meetings should take place in first language, or other language if agreed. Reports need to come back in English, French, German, Spanish or Italian by **April 17<sup>th</sup>**. Any other language will need to be translated into English.

All meetings need to take place between January and April. A small budget is available for lunch for meeting, and travel by council/staff.

### **Suggested focus group meeting are:**

- Dominique- French Section France and Wallonia with support from Federico or Iulia
- Ignace -Netherlands, perhaps Hans or others could provide reporting, as we have no Dutch speakers on team.
- Marian- Germany, German section with support from Petra (we thought since there are two Dutch speaker and only one German speaker Marian could attend the German meeting)
- Eric- UK- Atlantic Isles section Carol cannot attend as on Vilm at time of meeting)
- Thomas- Nordics (could also be a meeting together but your current section meeting date might be too early)
- Rolands- Baltic –with Meldra
- Gabor- Hungary can a member of staff assist with reporting and translate into English Zsolt again :)
- Giampiero –Italy – with Bridiga or Federico with Federparchi
- Paulo – Spain/Portugal with support from Dea or Petra
- Czech Republic (with possible Slovakia ) led by Czech section

### **Other possibilities**

- Dinaric arcs region, led by Martin Solar and Dea
- Romania -led by Erika Stanciu and ProPark

## Running focus groups

The focus group chair and reporter will be given all background papers of the EUROPARC Federation to assist in dealing with current governance and legal issues that may arise. Please have these available at the meeting.

After all of the members of the group have arrived, you should begin the session by introducing yourself, describing the purpose of the focus group, and explaining moderator /reporter and participant roles during the session.

All questions you ask, should be open and neutral. It is important for the moderator to be aware of participants' energy and concentration levels and provide short breaks if necessary. The moderator should encourage free-flowing discussion around the relevant issue(s). Try not to make the sessions too long, as people tend to lose interest in participating. Make sure to take notes and comments for an easier summary afterwards.



The focus group hated it. So he showed it to an out-of-focus group.

## The structure of the meeting

We are recommending you to follow the suggested questions of the online survey with the following aspect to elaborate. Please also encourage all member organisations to complete the online survey also. Try to plan time available to ensure questions that the group feel need greater in depth discussion are given sufficient time. We anticipate these meetings will require a half day, plus lunch for networking. Please do make the best.

You are not necessarily looking for consensus in response, but try to capture the considered views of a group of members even if divergent.

You may need flip chart, paper and/or beamer, but you are free to manage the meeting in a way that is comfortable for you and members.

## Topic areas to cover in the focus group meeting:

The focus group chair should introduce each section with some explanatory remarks.

We would suggest the following additional questions:

**Comment [C1]:** We would like input here with the questions, from council to finalise these questions...

- Satisfaction level of EUROPARC's work in different areas

Level of satisfaction of Federation's work:

- How satisfied are you as a member of EUROPARC in certain areas of our work. General opinion on the satisfaction. (Name some areas of work and start discussion)
- What should be the priorities of EUROPARC in the next 5 year?

- Communications

- What EUROPARC channel are the most preferred when receiving EUROPARC information?
- What kind of information would you like to have available through EUROPARC channels?
- What should be the Communication priorities of the EUROPARC Federation?

- Finance

- What services should be included in the basic membership fee?
- What services would you be willing to pay extra for?
- Currently some EUROPARC services are paid separately, e.g Charter and Transboundary. If these were combined with a basic membership fee. Which packages of membership fee would be most useful for you?

- Membership

- What should be the selection criteria to join the Federation?
- Who should be the members of EUROPARC?
- Can you indicate, from your perspective, which aspects of EUROPARC'S work ensure your active involvement in the management process of the Federation

- Governance

- What for you is the role and purpose of a section of the EUROPARC Federation?
- Would strengthening of sections through focus on one topic in the international protected area community help?
- Which level of benefits does your organization get from being a member of a Section?
- What should the role of non-members of EUROPARC be in sections?
- At which level do you think a EUROPARC section should work?
- How can the work of a section better reflect the priorities of EUROPARC, as agreed by the whole membership?
- How can communications and cooperation across sections; with council, directorate and working groups be improved?

- **Structure and functions of the Federation**
- Under which criteria should the members of the council be elected?
- Do you think that the introduction of another (special) organ could be an advantage for the Federation?
- In what way can EUROPARC improve its efficiency and effectiveness as a member's organisation?
- Given the stated aims of the Federation. What for you would be a measure of success?

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### **Other tips for running focus groups include:**

- Start on an issue people have strong feelings about and are familiar with  
(Perhaps satisfaction level of the work in general)
- Phrase issues in terms people will be familiar with (give examples)
- Let participants know their contributions are valuable  
(both through what you say and also your body language)
- The moderator should make sure to spend enough time on each of the topic areas of the consultation. The actual survey can be of use, and direct questions from there asked

### **It is also important that the moderator realises that:**

- It may be necessary for them to step in and keep the session on-track
- Disagreements and debates are useful when they lead to new and interesting ideas, but have to be managed carefully
- Issues of power and privacy need to be managed sensitively
- Focus groups should end with the moderator winding-up the session by stressing all that has achieved and casting it in a positive light.

### **Discussion flow and managing risks**

- A number of potential problems could arise during focus groups, which will all need addressing:
- If one participant tries to dominate the session, the moderator should invite each person to speak in turn
- Avoid interviewing friends in the same group as they can form cliques - if cliques do form, suggest taking a break and changing seating positions upon returning from the break
- Avoid personal confrontation - allow the group to police itself (e.g. "do others in the group agree?")
- Use differences of opinion as a topic of discussion - the moderator should avoid taking sides
- Useful tips to encourage discussion
- To facilitate useful, free-flowing discussion during the focus group, follow some of these tips:
- Ask participants to think about an issue for a few minutes and write down their responses
- Ask each participant to read, and elaborate on, one of their responses
- Note the responses on a flipchart/whiteboard

- Once everyone has given a response, participants will be asked for a second or third response, until all of their answers have been noted
- These responses can then be discussed

\*These areas can be easily covered by asking the questions appearing in the questionnaire, not offering the participants direct answers to choose, but instead opening a short discussion and taking notes on the comments. The questionnaire in a pdf format will be provided in a separate document.

## How to report

- A summary document should be produced for the session and sent to directorate office by **April 17th**. A report should be written up, containing relevant profile information about the people who attended the session. No longer than an A4 page.
- Reports can be written in one of the following languages: EN, ES, FR, IT and DE. The template for the reports will be provided in an additional document
- **The most valuable service a moderator can provide is objective conclusions based on the interpretation of the research, without regard for what EUROPARC wants to hear.** A qualitative research consultant must offer us total objectivity and honesty in order to provide the expected quality of service and professionalism.

## What happens next?

All results of the online survey and focus groups will be gathered and reported to EUROPARC council in **May**. Once they have agreed the main themes emerging, combined with the nature of networking paper agreed by the general assembly in 2012, a draft strategy will be produced with a small group drawn from members, sections and council, at a 3-day meeting in June at Siggen. This will be circulated to members for a brief consultation before being submitted to the General Assembly in late August for approval in October

Thanks and have fun!

### ***EUROPARC Federation Directorate Team***

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