

**Discussion Paper<sup>1</sup>**

**The role of Sections within the  
EUROPARC Federation**



**EUROPARC**  
**Atlantic Isles**  
Conservation Without Frontiers

January 2014

Europarc is very diverse in its structures and operations.

It has a central Federation directorate team and a series of area or country based groups (Sections). Europarc therefore operates both at the international level and the country or regional level. The Sections cover a significant area of Europe but do not offer 100% coverage. Membership arrangements have become confused because not all members of the Europarc Federation are members of their local Section, whilst some members have previously been members of their local Section and not the Federation.

The Federation directorate team and Sections have not always achieved the best out of each other's strengths or the maximum capacity of their combined resources and efforts, diluting the potential impact of a single organisation capable of operating at the European and sub European scales. Given the constraints on budgets and resources it is vital that the Federation makes the most of its networks and its capacity.

At the time of the merger discussions with Eurosite, EAI recommended that the new organisation (recommendations which are still highly relevant to the Strategy review):

- should have strong country or area based Sections covering 100% of the new organisation's geographic area, and
- that the Sections be seen as an integral part of the new organisation
- that the Sections be asked to lead and/or work together on specific areas of expertise
- that the Sections actively represent the new organisation at the sub European level and/or biogeographic region level
- that the lead officers employed by the Sections be seen as part of the new organisation's team i.e. the overall team structure comprising a small central team and a series of section based staff.
- That the Sections agree to assign time of a lead individual to the new network for XX days a year.

This structure would build on the strengths of a large European network organisation – offering the flexibility of a fully integrated central team and a dispersed Section

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was first published in December 2012 as a contribution to the then proposed merger between EUROPARC and Eurosite. The main issues still stand despite the outcome of the 2013 General Assembly and we have therefore revised the text slightly as a contribution to the Federation's consultation on its new strategy.

approach. It would underpin and bring genuine networking, fostering cooperation and exchange of experiences etc.

Sections have naturally become experts on particular areas of work, based upon issues of interest or concern. The new organisation can potentially capitalise on this strength of operation and the centres of expertise that have evolved, for example in marine and coastal habitats, grasslands, wetlands or with respect to designated species or species types.

This structure also offers a potential flexibility, whereby resources can be shared and pooled to achieve variable workloads; additional short term staff resources can be made available to achieve a particular work outcome and can stimulate joint working between different parts of Europe.

For example given the expertise developed by the EAI Section it is suggested that this Section could lead on Coast and Marine issues for the new organisation. Possible Section lead responsibilities are suggested as follows:

- Czech Section to lead on wilderness and / or transboundary cooperation
- EAI Section to lead on Coast & Marine
- Dutch speaking Section to lead on ecosystem services
- French Section to lead on sustainable tourism
- German Section to lead on volunteering
- Italian Section to lead on junior rangers
- Nordic Baltic Section to lead on health
- Spanish Section to lead on biodiversity

Please do not see this as a definitive list; it is simply to illustrate that a range of options for sharing and exchanging expertise are possible.

It is recognised that the above listing is based on existing Sections and does not provide 100% geographic coverage of the new organisation's area. Newly formed Sections would take on lead responsibilities as appropriate and as resources allow. Indeed transitional periods could be built into the new strategy.

The central team could focus on coordinating policy work, communications, project development, workshops and the annual conference in partnership with the Sections, as well as fostering inter-section and inter-member networking.

It is recognised that this structure would entail both the directorate team and the Sections changing current work practices. In addition, new lines of communication would have to be established, for example monthly meetings of section representatives with network core staff via videoconference.

### **Membership fees:**

The consultation provides an opportunity to establish a simple and clear membership fee structure, made up of two parts; a local Section fee and a European organisation fee.

The membership fee should be collected by the Section and the European organisation fee element passed onto to the central European team, thus avoiding members being invoiced twice for what appears to be membership of the same organisation.

This system could also operate with the central team collecting the membership fees and passing a percentage sum to the Sections. However assuming the central team is based in the Eurozone, then for those members outside the Eurozone each membership fee paid to a central team would carry a foreign currency transfer fee. Paying via the Sections would carry a single foreign currency fee payable as the Section transfers money from the Section to the central team.

Collecting fees at the Section level also helps to bring the organisation closer to its members.

The Sections would be responsible for maintenance of the membership databases in their countries or areas.

**We look forward to discussing these ideas with you during the consultation.**