

CIRCULAR COMMUNICATION TO COMMISSIONERS
AND CONTRACTING GOVERNMENTS
IWC.CCG.154

Changes to Annual Meeting Preparations and Procedures

I am writing to inform you of some changes to Annual Meeting preparations and procedures that the Secretariat intends to implement. We believe these changes, although not radical in nature, will help make meetings more efficient for Contracting Governments, for the Secretariat and for observers.

The ideas behind these changes were developed within the Secretariat before discussion with the Advisory Committee at its meeting in Monaco on Friday 9th February. The Advisory Committee supports the changes that are described below, together with a rationale. They are summarised at the end of this communication.

Advance planning of Annual Meeting venues

Currently any Contracting Government wishing to host an Annual Meeting is requested to give formal notice in advance of the preceding meeting (Rule of Procedure B.1), i.e. basically one year ahead. In the absence of such invitations, it is the Secretariat's responsibility to arrange the venue of the Annual Meeting. Given: (1) the increasing size of Annual Meetings now that observers and the press are admitted; (2) the consequent need to hold meetings in larger venues; and (3) the need to book venues well ahead, it would be more effective if governments wishing to host an Annual Meeting could indicate their intention much earlier.

We believe that ideally, decisions on the location of Annual Meetings should be taken two years in advance, as was the case for IWC/54 in 2002. To enable such decisions to be taken, it would be helpful if a country wishing to make a formal offer to host a meeting could submit its offer 3 months before the Annual Meeting at which a decision has to be made. Countries considering making an offer would be encouraged to consult with the Secretary at an early stage.

A formal offer should include:

- which meetings it covers, i.e. Scientific Committee, Commission Committees/Sub-committees/Working Groups, Annual Commission meeting;
- the location (town/city) and the venue;
- proposed timing; and
- information on what the host government would provide (i.e. over and above what the Commission normally provides – coffee would be a good example).

According to the timetable described above, the decision on the venue for IWC/55 in 2003 should preferably be taken at the Annual Meeting in London this summer. It may not be practicable to follow the suggested timetable fully this year but a separate Circular Communication is being distributed calling on Contracting Governments to consider whether they might wish to host the 2003 Annual Meeting.

Documents for the Commission and its sub-groups (excluding the Scientific Committee)

It is intended that:

1. Contracting Governments will be encouraged to submit documents in support of agenda items to the Secretariat not less than 5 weeks in advance of the meeting. The Secretariat would then distribute them to all Contracting Governments and observers, as appropriate (see items 2 and 3 below). (Note: It is hoped that this 5-week deadline will be respected. However, documents submitted to the Secretariat up to 3 weeks in advance will also be circulated before the meeting. Documents submitted to the Secretariat after this time will only be distributed at the meeting itself.)

Rationale: Circulation of documents well in advance will give governments time to consult at home prior to the meeting, and should help small delegations and delegations for whom English is not their first language. It will also enable better planning and scheduling of agenda items by the Chairman and Secretariat. Note that the Secretariat will ensure that the draft agendas for the various meetings will be circulated sufficiently in advance to enable governments to react within an appropriate time frame. In particular, draft agendas for Working Groups, Sub-committees and Committees will need to be circulated earlier than the current practice of 30 days before the meeting. The Draft Agenda for the Annual Commissioners' meeting, and the Provisional Annotated Agenda and Provisional Financial Statements will continue to be circulated by the Secretariat 100 days and 60 days respectively in advance, as required by Rule of Procedure H.2.(d).

2. Fresh copies of documents for Working Groups, Sub-committees, Committees and the Commission that have been circulated in advance of the Annual Meeting (as described above) will not be provided at the meetings. Delegates will be requested to bring these documents with them.

Rationale: Current practice has been to supply everyone with new sets of documents at the meeting, even if they were distributed in advance by email/post. This is wasteful of resources (e.g. paper, time spent photocopying, stuffing pigeon holes at the meeting – a not insignificant task). Asking delegates to bring previously circulated documents with them was tested successfully at the RMS intersessional meeting.

3. Non-restricted documents will be circulated to accredited observers in advance of the meetings, but after they have been circulated to Commissioners and Contracting Governments. Like country delegates, observers will be requested to bring these documents with them to the meetings.

Note that:

- a. observers will not receive documents prepared for the Finance and Administration Committee or any of its sub-groups;
- b. Rule of Procedure Q.3 states that 'Any document submitted to the Commission for distribution to Commissioners, Contracting Governments or members of the Scientific Committee is considered to be in the public domain unless it is designated by the author or government submitting it to be restricted. Such restriction is automatically lifted when the report of the meeting to which it is submitted becomes publicly available under1. [i.e. Q.1] above'.
Documents that governments wish to keep restricted should be marked accordingly when submitted to the Secretariat.

Rationale: Current practice is to provide observers with only the draft agenda for the Annual Commission Meeting in advance. Circulation of all non-restricted documents before the meetings – which can largely be done by email – would help observers to be better informed about issues to be discussed. Additional work to the Secretariat in circulating documents in advance would be offset by not having to provide these documents for all observers at the meeting. With the permission of Bo Fernholm (IWC Chairman) and the support of Fer von der Assen (RMS Working Group Chairman), pre-circulation of meeting documents to observers was tested successfully at the RMS intersessional meeting and was much appreciated by the observers.

4. A firm deadline will be set for all Opening Statements, i.e. 17.00 on the first day of the Annual Meeting. If Opening Statements are not with the Secretariat by this time, then the Secretariat will not copy and distribute them as formal meeting documents. This will not preclude Commissioners from having statements addressing particular issues distributed as meeting documents. Opening statements will be collated and copied together (i.e. rather than copying and distributing individually) but will be separated into (a) statements from Contracting Governments, and (b) statements from observers.

Rationale: Currently, Opening Statements are submitted to the Secretariat throughout the Annual Commissioners Meeting for photocopying and distribution, particularly by NGOs. Receiving statements earlier and distributing them in batches will (a) help statements live up to their name, and (b) improve efficiency of the Secretariat, e.g. by freeing up time that can be better spent on copying Resolutions and other draft documents.

In summary, the following changes will be implemented:

Annual Meeting venues

- Decisions on venues for Annual Meetings will be taken by the Commission two years in advance, to the extent possible.

Documents for the Commission and its sub-groups (excluding the Scientific Committee)

- Contracting Governments will be encouraged to submit documents in support of agenda items to the Secretariat not less than 5 weeks in advance of the meeting. (But see note above for further details on circulation deadlines).
- All delegates will be requested to bring documents circulated in advance with them to the meeting. Fresh copies will not be provided.
- Non-restricted documents will be circulated to accredited observers in advance of the meeting soon after they have been circulated to Contracting Governments. Observers will be requested to bring these documents with them to the meeting.
- A deadline of 17.00 on the first day of the Annual Commission Meeting will be set for Opening Statements.

Finally, the Secretariat is considering how the IWC web page could be used to distribute documents (e.g. by placing them on a password-protected site from which they can be downloaded by delegates) as is current practice with some other intergovernmental organisations such as CCAML. Unlike the items 1-4 above, this is a longer-term plan, but the Secretariat will develop a proposal for consideration by the Finance and Administration Committee at IWC/53 in London.

Some of the changes might lead eventually to amendments to the Rules of Procedure, but since the modified procedures are partly experimental, their effectiveness should be reviewed during or after this year's Annual Meeting before any action is taken to formalise them in this way.

I hope that you will look favourably on these changes. However, please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any concerns.

Dr. Nicky Grandy
Secretary to the Commission