

## ADMISSION OF THE PRESS AT ANNUAL MEETINGS

(Prepared by the Secretariat)

At the 48<sup>th</sup> (1996) Annual Meeting the Finance and Administration Committee recommended that the Commission adopt a Danish proposal to offer the press an equal standard of attendance as the NGOs currently enjoy, including access to meeting rooms and relevant IWC documentation (subject to practical and logistical considerations and noting that the present Rules of Conduct for Observers prohibit the entry and use of recording equipment). However, plenary discussion resulted in the matter being referred back to the Committee.

At the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting

'Denmark reviewed last year's discussion and modified its proposal by specifying that the press should have the same access as NGOs contingent upon payment of the NGO fee. The proposal sparked a spirited discussion, with all delegations agreeing in principle that the press should be more involved in IWC meetings. The USA asked whether in allowing the press access to meetings, all documents would then become public immediately. The Secretariat replied that the Rules of Conduct for observers, which prohibit the leaking of documents, would be in operation for the press as well. Questions were asked about the credentials to be required of reporters, the price they should pay for admittance, possible logistical difficulties and the need to distinguish between *bona fide* news media and PR personnel. After a number of delegations argued for unfettered press access, the Chairman concluded that the Finance and Administration Committee would recommend to the Commission that the press be allowed access to the next meeting, on the same basis as NGOs and given access to documents; he noted that there seemed to be support for the Secretary's suggestion that they be charged a nominal fee approximately equal to the costs of producing the documents they require. The Commission should review the matter in the light of experience at its next meeting.

The Commission agreed to this arrangement, and the Secretary will revise the Rules of Conduct for Observers to take account of this decision.' (*Chairman's Report of the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, item 21*)

The Secretariat has been considering the practical arrangements necessary to implement this decision including ways to deal with some incongruities which arise *vis a vis* the relationships between the Press and NGOs.

### **Procedures applicable to NGOs which are inappropriate in relation to the Press.**

#### *Application for accreditation*

New NGOs have to apply not less than 60 days prior to the start of the meeting in order to become accredited as observers to the IWC, in other words to become privileged attendees at the Commission's meetings. NGOs, almost by definition, have their own positions and policies to promote and although this is wholly legitimate few would claim any pretensions to neutrality. This is not, or should not be, the case with mainstream Press (Radio, TV, national and provincial newspapers etc.) whose attendance the Commission wishes to encourage in the interest of transparency i.e. the dissemination of accurate and impartial factual information to the world at large.

*Bona fide* press entities generally have no difficulty with applying in advance. However, from a purely practical point of view news media do not routinely operate with such an extended time scale and tend to make last-minute decisions about which events to cover. (See credentials)

#### *Credentials*

The Commission's Rules of Procedure require that 'The names and status of all . . . observers . . . shall be notified in writing . . . before their participation . . . The written notification shall be made by . . . the heads of organisations . . .' [emphases added]

The Commission has decided 'written notification' means a document with an original signature i.e. that photocopies and fax and electronic communications are not acceptable as credentials. This is already a constant source of administrative difficulty in that not a few Contracting Governments and many NGOs fail to comply with this requirement without pressure from the Secretariat which is not always appreciated.

Application of this requirement to the Press is not practicable and to date the Secretariat has taken the presentation of a valid international or national press card or union of journalists card to represent adequate credentials for the Press. Other persons seeking admission as 'Press' (e.g. freelance writers, film-makers, staff of house journals) have been admitted on presentation of an accepted form of identification (passport, driving licence) and a letter of introduction from e.g. a commissioning editor or publisher. This has not proved difficult to administer but the system has been abused, or rather, exploited by some NGOs which have used it as a means to gain admittance to the Press Room of additional members of their staffs and thus having a permanent presence to interpret the proceedings to the Press. This has resulted in a number of complaints from *bona fide* journalists. On two occasions film crews admitted under this procedure have been very intrusive in their activities in and around the meeting area to the extent of being warned that they risked losing their accreditation.

#### *Notification of attendance*

In order to enable the Secretary to ensure adequate facilities at meetings the Commission has instructed that all intending participants are required to provide 30 days notification of their attendance at meetings. For the reasons already stated this is impracticable for the Press.

Only one observer per NGO (plus an interpreter if necessary) is permitted into the meeting room and passes are issued for the purpose of implementing this policy. It is a source of some difficulty in that many NGOs now send 'delegations' of between 3 and 10 individuals and resent the restrictions necessitated by making arrangements to meet (sometimes outside the building in which meetings are taking place depending upon the security arrangements) in order to exchange the pass.

It would be neither easy nor sensible to insist upon only one representative from each press entity in the meeting room, particularly since, during the opening plenary session sound and vision recording is permitted so that there is an influx of camera/sound crew for that session.

#### *Fees*

The NGO fee was introduced in a period of financial stringency and was originally seen as serving two functions; one, to provide an additional source of revenue and secondly, but perhaps regarded as more important at the time, to restrict the number and influence of NGOs attending the IWC's meetings. The introduction of fees has been spectacularly successful on the first count and equally unsuccessful on the second.

To achieve the two objectives and to avoid any suggestion that it conferred any obligation on the part of the Commission to provide any specific services (e.g. provision of documents), the NGO fee was deliberately set at an arbitrary level (rather than as a payment for services or facilities) and described as a registration fee. For 1998 the NGO fee is £485.

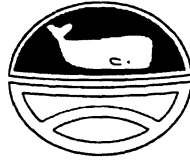
It is unrealistic to imagine that the Press will pay a fee remotely approaching this level and, indeed, since the attendance of the Press is now being actively sought by the Commission in the interest of transparency it would not be logical to impose a large fee.

It has been suggested that the Press should pay a fee representing the cost of producing documents. The Secretariat has long resisted this approach because it is possible to justify a very large range of costs depending on the factors one chooses to take into account (i.e. the result can be moulded to meet pre-determined criteria). Moreover, whilst nearly all NGOs want to have complete sets of documents some members of the Press may want only a selection. In the Commission's present financial circumstances, the Secretariat's concern is now less to do with the costs than with the administrative effort involved to provide the required documentation quickly, efficiently and with the minimum of wastage. (For a body concerned with conservation and environmental matters the IWC discards an enormous quantity of paper at each meeting).

### **Practical arrangements at IWC/50**

Given the lack of time for a full consideration of the issues the Secretariat proposes to implement the following procedures for the 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in Oman.

1. The Press will be defined as 'news media' and identified by the presentation of a valid national or international Press Card. No exceptions
2. Each news entity will be required to pay a nominal registration fee of £20. (This will cover an individual or, as appropriate a reporter plus photographer, an entire sound or camera crew.
3. Members of the Press will be encouraged to pre-register in advance
4. On registration at the meeting venue, members of the press who satisfy the definition in 1. will receive an IWC Press Pass
5. The issue of a Press badge entitles the holder to a seat in the meeting room for the sessions of the Plenary and the Technical Committee as well as access to the Press Room and all the meeting areas.
6. The Provisional Agenda, list of delegates and list of documents will be made freely available in press room for no charge and in advance of the opening session. Complete sets of other documents will be made available to each Press organisation which has paid the registration fee. These will be distributed by means of individually labelled pigeonholes.
7. Reports of Sub-committees and Working Groups will be made available in accordance with the existing procedure endorsed by the Commission at the 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting. ie Reports of all committees, sub-committees and working groups of the Commission are strictly confidential until the opening plenary session of the Commission meeting to which they are submitted.  
*[Rules of Procedure of the Commission, section Q. Commission Documents].*
8. Each member of the Press will receive a copy of the Provisional Rules of Conduct (attached) at registration at the meeting venue.



**PROVISIONAL**  
**RULES OF CONDUCT FOR THE PRESS**

These rules apply to meetings of the Technical Committee and Plenary Sessions to which the Press is invited in 1998 on an experimental basis. A copy of these rules will be issued to each member of the Press at registration..

1. Filming and sound recording inside the meeting room is permitted during the opening plenary session (on Saturday 16 May) only. Entry and use of visual recording equipment (e.g. cameras and video recorders) is prohibited at all other times.
2. Sound recording of plenary sessions is permitted but, to avoid disruption to the proceedings, this should be done from the sound relay in the Press Room. Under no circumstances will the use of 'roving mikes' or live transmission from the meeting room be permitted.
3. Interviews, filming and recording may be carried out in the areas adjacent to the meeting room but not immediately outside the entry and exit doors.
4. It is prohibited to bring mobile telephones into the meetings.
5. Quotations from or use of draft documents is prohibited.
6. Failure to conform to these or any other rules that the Commission may adopt will result in withdrawal of accreditation.