

Expert Focus Group Meeting on ESS6

Sydney, Australia, November 18, 2014

Summary of Comments and Questions from Participants¹

The Focus Group meeting was held as an informal side event at the World Parks Congress. Participants represented a range of Stakeholders (see Annex 1). Following a brief overview presentation of the ESS Framework and ESS6 by Agi Kiss (WB-OPSOR), the floor was opened for comments and questions from the participants. The following is a brief summary.

ESS6 Objectives: Participants had different views regarding the Objectives of the Standard. Some felt they were fine as currently articulated, while others suggested as an alternative:

Objective 1 = protect and conserve biodiversity;

Objective 2 – use biodiversity/biological resources sustainably.

There was also discussion as to whether the term “Living Natural Resources” should be defined. One participant asked whether the objective of protecting and conserving biodiversity, together with the application of the “precautionary principle,” would mean in effect that the World Bank could not fund any development activities because it is not possible to fully know and understand all aspects of any given ecosystem and therefore the potential impacts of any given intervention.

Transparency: Some participants indicated that they felt the new Framework is good with respect to being more flexible and adaptable than the existing OP 4.04, but that it also raises the risk of less transparency regarding how and by whom judgement-based decisions are made. It is important to introduce strong measures to combat the risk of reduced transparency, e.g. by including stronger provisions for disclosure of assessments and other documents in ESS10.

Greater Reliance on Country Systems: Some participants indicated that they supported this approach in principle, but that it introduced significant risks and the need for careful and transparent assessment of country systems and capacity, and resources to fill gaps.

In addition, a participant suggested that World Bank should also help to build capacity of other international financial institutions which have less solid policies and/or capacity for environmental and social risk management.

Ecosystem Services: Some participants felt that more reference to maintaining Ecosystem Services should be included, while recognizing that implementation of this concept (as articulated in PS6) has proven challenging for IFC. The point was that ESS6 should recognize that loss of ecosystem services can lead to negative impacts on people, and that a compensatory biodiversity offset (particularly in another

¹ Prepared by Agi Kiss

location) is not likely to replace this value. Some other participants felt that Ecosystem Services occur/are provided naturally when ecosystems are well maintained, therefore the emphasis should be on the latter.

Classification of Habitats: Most participants felt that ESS6 should follow the same classification system as PS6 (i.e.: Critical Habitats, Natural Habitats, Modified Habitats) rather than the current approach, and found the concept of categorization based on “Priority Biodiversity Features” to be unnecessarily confusing. However, it is important not to drop key elements of the PS6 language, such as the references to unique ecosystems and endemic species (which are currently absent in ESS6. In general, participants felt it important that ESS6 and PS6 be as consistent with one another as possible, including with regard to terminology. On the other hand, a participant appreciated the ESS6 reference (in Footnotes) to ecological structures and the functions needed to maintain the viability of priority biodiversity features... this language is not in PS6 but it would be good to retain it in ESS6.

If the WB nevertheless decides to retain the “PBF” concept, it would be useful to include a discussion of Key Biodiversity Areas, as the ongoing process of defining KBA’s could provide robust criteria for “PBF.” One participant stressed the need to include irreplaceability as an important criterion.

Nature of Impacts: One participant proposed more detailed discussion of indirect impacts, and stressed the need to discuss the disconnect between the temporary nature/limited duration of most mitigation measures, compared with the often permanent or long term impacts of project impacts.

Invasive Species: Various participants suggested that ESS6 should recognize that not all alien species are invasive; that the Standard should address management of existing alien species, not only avoiding the introduction of new ones; and that Standard should address issues of biosecurity, including the use of toxic materials (e.g. pesticides) if needed to control invasive species.

Supporting Documents and Guidance Notes: All participants stressed the need for good Guidance Notes to provide supporting details for the Standard, and that there should be public consultations also on the GN. Some aspects which Guidance Notes should cover include: (i) definition of “Good International Practice” (and who would define this in any given case); (ii) reference to Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) sites (irreplaceable biodiversity assets); (iii) specific guidance for preparation of Biodiversity Action Plans;

Biodiversity Offsets: Participants stressed the need for explicit recognition that some sites and biodiversity features are irreplaceable and thus not “off-settable” (e.g. AZE sites), and for strong emphasis on application of the precautionary principle considering the limited/mixed track record of offsets to date and lack of long-term evidence of their successful application.

Current trends and issues in Biodiversity Conservation: Some participants felt that the ESS6 is somewhat dated, i.e. does not reflect some of the most up-to-date issues and debates within the Community of Practice (e.g., the merits and possibilities of habitat restoration, creation of “novel

ecosystems” as a mitigation measure for loss of natural habitats, the significance of genetically modified organisms, etc.

Costs and Financing: A participant stressed the need for ESS6 to explicitly call for internalizing costs and for ensuring that there is ASSURED FINANCING (e.g. for implementation of the Biodiversity Action Plan). This includes building in mechanisms to ensure that monitoring continues over the long term (beyond the life of the project).

Additional specific suggestions on ESS6 by one or more participants:

(In the overall architecture of the ESS Framework, the word “Directives” should probably be replaced by something less bureaucratic.

Climate change impacts should be considered in the identification of important biodiversity areas/critical habitats – e.g. the likely need for species to shift their ranges in the future due to CC.

There should be more emphasis on outcome monitoring (including methodology

Comments on other ESS:

A participant expressed concern that ESS9, calls for application of the ESS Standards to be limited to “high risk” sub-projects.

A participant felt that the importance of identifying and addressing cumulative impacts should be stressed more strongly in the ESS Framework overall, including ESS1.

Meeting Participants

(including World Bank support team)

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