

CONCLUDING ADDRESS: THE WAY FORWARD

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I would like to start by recognising the rich collection of activities and ideas on invasive species offered by so many people of great intelligence and passion at this conference.

We must recognise that this is an issue of utmost importance. It is on par with loss of habitat and with air and water pollution. Governments have not yet given invasive species the attention due. I hope that we will see the issue elevated to its proper status by this decade's end.

I will focus on those issues raised at this conference for which our experience in the United States and President Clinton's Executive Order on Invasive Species (February 1999) in particular are particularly relevant.

Some at this conference have said that national governments should establish a single agency to deal with invasive species and enact organic legislation for the purpose. These are good ideas. In the United States, however, and I warrant many other nations, management of invasive species is already firmly divided between competing agencies. The best solution in this situation may be to form an interagency authority and ask those agencies to speak through a single voice. That is what President Clinton has done through his executive order. In our case that voice is to be expressed through a national management plan prepared by the interagency Invasive Species Council (Council) created by the order. Our first plan is due this August.

The President's executive order also has various specific mandates to be addressed in national management planning and action:

The order directs each US agency to identify its actions that may affect invasive species and to take actions for prevention, detection, eradication, education, capacity building, monitoring, restoration and research. The order also directs US agencies, to the extent practicable and permitted by law, not to authorise, fund, or carry out any actions in the United States or elsewhere that promote the introduction or spread of invasive species, unless, pursuant to guidelines that it has issued the agency determines publicly that the benefits of the actions outweigh its cost. This directive applies immediately. The agencies are not on hold until the Council issues its first plan or otherwise prompts them.

The President's order also enumerates tasks for the Council. One task is to facilitate field actions in the US addressing invasive species -- action by governments below the national level or by others. Actions akin to the Working for Water Programme. This task basically comes down to offering tools for planning and action and resources.

A second task is to incorporate invasive species into our well-established environmental assessment system under the US National Environmental Policy Act. By adding them to the list of priority areas, which now include endangered species and wetlands, we will greatly increase attention and resources provided for them when actions are being planned.

Two mandates of the President's order concern information. The order directs the Council to develop a co-ordinated system among Federal agencies for documenting and monitoring the economic, environmental and human health impacts caused by invasive species.

The order also directs the Council to establish a Web-based system for sharing information. This system will hold and make accessible a range of information, covering, for example,

information about invasive species abundance, life histories, invasive characteristics and impacts.

A fundamental and difficult task for the Council is to establish a system assuring that no organisms are imported into the US unless the risk of harmful invasion by them has been assessed and determined acceptable. This task is to be educated by a review of existing laws and programs. Intentional and unintentional imports pose somewhat different policy issues. The accidental importation of invasives requires identification of priority pathways and creative solutions for pathway interdiction.

Intentional importation of organisms will require a screen. Some refer to this as red, green and yellow. For the most part our screen is currently green. We need a better system. A first step is to put on the Web a list of those species that are currently regulated by US agencies as invasive or potentially invasive – because of harm to the environment, economy or human health. I expect that the US will begin work on this task in the next few months. We expect to put this on-line at <http://invasivespecies.gov>. Beside each listed species we have in mind to place a hotlink to the rule or other provisions, which define the specifics of the species regulation. Other links or comments may be provided too.

The more difficult task will be to launch a process that will conclude in a system allowing no intentional importation unless a green light is given. We need more science and we need thorough input from stakeholders. But mostly we need to set our will to that end and get there.

All of these steps require money. I believe that US agencies require an order-of-magnitude greater funding than they have currently to do the job right. No doubt others are similarly situated.

I will end with a few comments on international cooperation, which is another task that President Clinton has given to the US Invasive Species Council. Secretary Babbitt addressed this when he spoke on the first day of this workshop. As he stated, we need a general multilateral agreement for invasive species and the right mechanism is a protocol developed pursuant to Article 8 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). When the protocol is done, I hope that the United States of America will be a party to it and to the CBD as a whole.

In the interim, we need to keep pursuing less formal means of international cooperation. This workshop is one kind of vehicle, and we hope that delegates from South Africa and technical experts will join us at a meeting on invasive species in Arizona in April of 2001 to continue the momentum of this workshop. I also would like to suggest that the participants in this workshop consider the merits of launching an initiative analogous to the International Coral Reef Initiative, whose purpose would be to pursue research and conservation actions in the immediate future as the CBD goes forward with its work on this issue.

Thank you. This has been a wonderful and productive conference.