

**THE INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH GROUP ON WOOD PROTECTION**

**Strategy development in 2008/2009**

**Compiled by J Norton**

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At the final plenary session of the 2007 IRG conference held in Jackson Hole, Wyoming a number of challenges facing the future of international wood protection research were raised. The question of IRG's potential role in addressing these challenges was asked.

From that presentation, the factors indicating the changing situation include:

- The declining number of researchers in the field. This was attributed to due to fewer university programs and the key members moving towards retirement
- Industry becoming more insular due to the use of knowledge to maximise profits
- Reduction in impartial government funded research with the privatisation of national laboratories
- Litigation potential from the discussion of ideas due to confidentiality constraints.

These factors impact on the number and quality of publications which at present are IRG's primary output. The President's Consultative Panel (PCP) considered it was appropriate to revisit the values and purpose of IRG in order to meet these challenges and stay relevant. The PCP developed a survey to canvas members' views and plans to use the survey results in developing a plan for the future.

The survey covered the following:

- *How is IRG performing now – its strengths and weaknesses?*
- *How should IRG be conducting its business – its structures and processes?*
- *What is IRG best positioned to provide for members – its outputs?*
- *Where should IRG be heading and what should it achieve – its outcomes?*

Because of the time constraints resulting from a desire to report results back to the IRG 39 meeting, the draft survey was subjected to limited testing (6 members) before being offered to all IRG members.

There were 134 responses to the survey representing the opinions of approximately 30% of the number of IRG members. This is considered to be an extremely good response and is taken as an indication of the strong level of interest by members. The raw data collated from the responses is set out below.

**Table 1** Number of responses – Question 1

Overall value	No response	Not at all	A little	Rather important	Very important
Q1a Access to emerging science	4	0	8	31	91
Q1b Publish non-refereed work	8	29	40	36	21
Q1c Access to contacts	4	0	5	31	94
Q1d Prestige	8	23	46	37	20

**Table 2** Number of responses – Question 2

Importance of activities	No response	Not at all	A little	Rather important	Very important
Q2a Hear up to date research	3	0	2	27	102
Q2b Platform to air ideas	5	2	24	48	55
Q2c Attend overseas conferences	5	24	41	44	20
Q2d Access to papers/c'pendium/n'letter	4	1	8	29	92
Q2e Discuss ideas	6	1	18	49	60
Q2f Interact with likeminded scientists	5	1	12	50	65
Q2g Compare my performance	6	19	39	46	24
Q2h Learn diff test methods & processes	5	5	14	52	58
Q2i Advance my org commercially	8	40	32	32	21
Q2j Publish my research as an IRG doc	9	24	48	39	14
Q2k Have referees for job applications	9	70	32	15	8
Q2l To mentor or be mentored	9	41	39	26	19
Q2m Access to an international forum	9	6	12	51	56

**Table 3** Number of responses – Question 3

Effectiveness of .....	No response	Not at all	A little	Rather effective	Very effective
Q31 The Executive Council	25	1	10	56	42
Q3b Scientific Program C'tee & Work Parties	17	1	7	64	45
Q3c Local Conf Organizing C'tee	24	1	18	49	42
Q3d Secretariat	16	1	1	22	94
Q3e Awards (travel, RCA, Gareth Williams)	24	4	14	44	48
Q3f Procedures Manual	24	3	28	43	36

**Table 4** Number of responses – Question 4

Quality of IRG's products	No response	Very low	Not bad	Quite high	Very high
Q4a Annual conference	9	2	7	59	56
Q4b Compendium System	18	1	9	35	71
Q4c Research papers	7	0	32	57	38
Q4d Award schemes	27	2	26	55	24
Q4e Business & Scientific contacts	14	1	12	52	54
Q4f Mentoring & support for new members	24	10	37	38	25
Q4g International focal point	16	4	22	43	49
Q4h Web site	9	2	22	66	34
Q4i Secretariat services	13	0	7	30	84
Q4j Annual meeting CD	10	2	9	34	79

**Table 5** Number of responses – Question 5

Agree or disagree	No response	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Q5a IRG is functioning well	6	0	3	84	41
Q5b Fees give value for money	9	0	3	70	52
Q5c IRG should continue as is	10	2	23	63	36
Q5d IRG has outlived its usefulness	15	61	44	9	5
Q5e Higher prominence in sustainability debate	9	1	4	57	63
Q5f Future depends on contribution to resource sustainability	13	1	20	58	42
Q5g IRG should influence research direction	10	2	24	53	45
Q5h IRG should make policy on wood protection	11	8	31	44	40

**Table 6** Number of responses – Question 6

IRG should drive research that achieves.....	No response	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Q6a Improvement in preserving wood products.	5	1	1	49	78
Q6b Recognition of impact on sustainability	5	1	4	45	79
Q6c Value for money wood products	9	2	10	50	63
Q6d Increased use of less durable timber	12	3	14	64	41
Q6e Better use of the right timber	11	1	4	62	56
Q6f Better profits for the wood protection industry	15	6	40	60	13
Q6g Better informed wood protection industry.	9	1	4	54	66
Q6h Better informed Consumers of for. Prod	7	2	10	45	70

**Table 7** Number of responses – Question 7

Main area of work in wood protection	
Q7a Commercial, industry, business, consult	63
Q7b Government	24
Q7c Academia	47
Q7d Other	8

**Table 8** Number of responses – Question 8

Time involved in wood protection research	
Q8a < 5 yrs in wood protection research	14
Q8b > 5 yrs in wood protection research	117

**Table 9** Number of responses – Question 9

Current role	
Q9a Manager, CEO, Director, Head of school	41
Q9b Professional researcher	70
Q9c Consultant	18
Q9d Sales	2
Q9e Regulatory	5
Q9f Technician	3
Q9g Student	4
Q9h Other	5

**Table 10** Number of responses – Question 10

How many times have you	No response	Never	1 to 2	3 to 10	> 10
Q10a Attended the Annual IRG Conference	8	41	37	24	24
Q10b Read IRG conference papers	4	1	19	52	58
Q10c Contacted other IRG members	4	9	29	49	43
Q10d Contacted the secretariat	8	23	72	20	11
Q10e Visited the IRG web site	4	1	31	52	46
Q10f Read the news letter	4	0	34	61	35
Q10g Used the compendium's search engine	9	18	30	32	45

Extra comments were also received.

When interpreting the results obtained, it is important to note that the results reported indicate the number of responses to a classification for a question. The responses do NOT indicate the importance of a particular set of responses. For example Question 2 K asks how important it is to have IRG members as referees. The response to the question is repeated below.

Importance of activities	No response	Not at all	A little	Rather important	Very important
Q2k Have referees for job applications	9	70	32	15	8

Eight of the respondents classified the activity as ‘Very important’ compared to 70 responses advising that having a referee is not at all important. This does not necessarily mean that the availability of referees from IRG is not important.

Rather than examining responses to individual questions or categories, the following high level interpretations have been made. The percentage values quoted have been obtained by summing the “Rather important” and “Very important” totals and expressing the result as a percent of total responses. There are other ways of interpreting the data.

- IRG is highly valued by the members - access to emerging science & contacts (Q1&2)
- IRG services and outputs are acknowledged and appreciated by members
- There is a concern about the future.
- 96% believe that IRG should have higher prominence in the sustainability debate
- 83% believe that the future of IRG depends on contribution to resource sustainability
- 68% believe IRG should make policy on wood protection.
- Responses to Question 6 indicate a lot of support about the purpose of research

The responses indicate that IRG is an inwardly focused organization and that there is an opportunity to use its collective (considerable) power to impact **outside** the organization.

The data from this first survey was presented at IRG 39 in Istanbul. Conference delegates were then invited to offer their opinions on

- The external influences impacting on IRG.
- An Aim statement for IRG and
- The proportion of effort that should be expended on advocacy of word protection outside the organization.

Impacting influences were rated as high, medium or low relevance to the organization and a total of 80 responses were obtained. Results are summarized below.

			Number of responses				
			No response	Low relevance	Medium relevance	High relevance	% high relevance
Environmental influences	Water		24	17	21	18	23
	Food		22	41	12	5	6
	Fuel		22	13	31	14	18
	Deforestation		18	9	13	40	50
	Global warming debate		19	6	18	37	46
	Sustainability		20	1	6	53	66
	Carbon sequestration		22	8	17	33	41
	Climate change		22	9	15	34	43
	Pollution		20	4	16	40	50
Globalization influences	International standardization	Money for science	20	8	10	42	53
		Trade barriers	24	22	18	16	20
		Quarantine	25	26	18	11	14
		Chemicals	25	7	12	36	45
		Knowledge	23	2	7	48	60
	International business	Corporates	31	16	11	22	28
		Safety	27	11	21	21	26
		Producer responsibility	27	5	23	25	31
	Government	Policy environment	26	4	13	37	46
	Image		31	1	12	36	45
Influence of the Science environment	Sexy science - where the money is	Genetic engineering	22	31	19	8	10
		Global warming	22	9	14	35	44
		Fuels	21	10	29	20	25
		Pharmaceuticals	22	41	11	6	8
	Universities	Transient scientists	25	8	14	33	41
		Forest products schools	26	2	15	37	46
	Costs	Selling out	35	10	24	11	14
		Entrepreneurs	42	12	10	16	20
	Fun of science	45	5	9	21	26	

A range of responses were received on the contents of an “Aim” statement for IRG. This matter is not finalized and will be dealt with by the steps described below.

IRG 39 delegate’s responses on the proportion of effort that should be expended on communications directed outside IRG are summarized below. There were 48 (out of 80) responses to this question.

% of effort that should be expended on promotion	Number
0	1
5	1
10	13
20	25
30	4
40	3
60	1

A draft Strategic Statement has been prepared from all the available information.

A Special Strategy Group consisting of the Executive Committee plus a number of invited members is to be established. The Special Strategy Group is to meet on the Sunday morning before the Beijing meeting to consider the draft Strategic statement and amend/endorse the proposed objectives in the Statement.

The results from the Special Strategy Group are to be ratified by the EC followed by presentation to the meeting during a session set aside for the purpose.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Jack Norton.