



Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Programme Media Guide

Regional Communications and Networks Coordinator
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CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	3
Who To Inform When Organising a Media Event or Sending a Press Release	4
Approval Process for MWBP Media Material	5
Approval Process for Externally Produced Media Material	5
Format of MWBP Media Material and Name Use	6
Format of Media Material When One or More of the Implementing Partners Does Not Approve MWBP Content	6
Quick Tips for Writing a Press Release	7
What is Newsworthy?	8
Responding to Media Enquiries	9
Interview Tips	10
Controversial Issues	13
MWBP Media Spokes Persons	14
The Five Fs of Media	15
A Last Word	16

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- IUCN – The World Conservation Union, Global Communications Unit (Global Media Protocol)
- Media Training Manual of the Chicago Zoological Society (1994)
- SSC and the Media (2001)
- Reuters Home Content Manual (2003)
- Communicating Science (2003)
- National Disaster Search Dog Foundation Media Protocol (2002)
- Kentucky Department of Education Procedure on Release of Public Information (2003)
- Smoking Cessation Services: Telling the Success Story Media Guide (2003)

INTRODUCTION

Positive media coverage is a prized commodity and can only be gained by building working relationships with journalists, as a result of consistently proving to be reliable, informative and available.

Media clippings that recognise the work of the Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Programme (MWBP) further the programme's work by spreading key messages to the public, boosting staff morale, and providing a useful resource to include in donor proposals and information kits.

Although it is largely the role of communications staff to generate key contacts for MWBP, everyone plays an important part in projecting the image of the programme and can greatly contribute to achieving greater recognition of the programme's work.

The purpose of this MWBP media guide is to ensure that all information about MWBP that is disseminated to the media about MWBP is accurate, comprehensive, complete and tailored to the needs of the media.

This guide is intended to provide operational guidelines for MWBP staff who have the responsibility and/or authority to engage with media on behalf of MWBP. The guide is also designed to assist MWBP staff in their interactions with media, by outlining the correct procedures to follow when interacting with the media.

As MWBP is a complex programme involving governments, implementing partners and donors, certain procedures must be defined with regard to the approval and clearance of the press material before release. In addition, certain procedures are required for proper response to and recording of media inquiries.

Overall MWBP wants to be regarded as a professional, useful and successful programme. This programme image, and the messages it contains, can be developed and maintained through the establishment and growth of positive working relationships with the media.

NB: Media/press are defined as the means of communication that reach large numbers of people in a short time, such as television, newspapers, magazines, radio and Internet, together with the people involved in their production.

WHO TO INFORM WHEN ORGANISING A MEDIA EVENT OR SENDING A PRESS RELEASE

In order to ensure cohesion of media events across the region, and efficiency when working with the media, it is essential that advanced information be distributed when planning a media event. The follow steps have been devised to ensure all relevant parties are kept informed:

1. The Regional Communications and Networks Coordinator and relevant National Communications and Training Coordinator are to be informed once it has been decided to host a media event, information should include: date of event, type of event, contact person, draft agenda.
2. The National Communications and Training Coordinator should be informed of and/or involved in all aspects of planning the media event and writing media information. The National Communications and Training Coordinator must keep the National Programme Coordinator and Regional Communications and Networks Coordinator informed of all relevant details.
3. Media information for distribution must be forwarded to the Regional Communications and Networks Coordinator no later than one week prior to the event (e.g. press release, media kits, briefings, agendas, background information, invitations etc.)
4. The Regional Communications and Networks Coordinator is responsible for forwarding relevant information to the partner organisations (UNDP, IUCN and MRC) and the UNDP Team Leader no later than three days prior to the event.

NB: When planning to send a press release after an event, steps 2-4 apply.

APPROVAL PROCESS FOR MWBP MEDIA MATERIAL

To ensure that all MWBP media material meets the highest standards of quality and accurately states the programme's official word, the following approval process for all media material has been established:

1. All media material produced by MWBP must be reviewed and approved by the National Programme Coordinator responsible for that country, who will share it for comment with the relevant National Programme Director.
2. All media material produced by MWBP must be reviewed and approved by the Regional Communications and Networks Coordinator prior to release, or in his/her absence the UNDP Team Leader, who will share the it for comment with the three implementing partners.
3. All material containing signatures and/or quotations must be approved by the stated person.
4. The person mentioned as the contact person (for more information) must be consulted and agree to respond to follow-up media enquiries (please also ensure that the contact person will be contactable post-release, e.g. mobile telephone is in range)
5. All material produced in a regional language must be approved by a native speaker of that language.
6. The Regional Communications and Networks Coordinator must distribute all media material to the implementing partners for information (prior to release), and upload to the website (after embargo date).

NB: Media materials are any written and/or audiovisual documents (press releases, press statements, brochures, booklets, summaries of research reports, video news releases, direct-mail materials, e-mail listserves, web or other electronic documents) developed by the MWBP staff and expressly intended for wide distribution and media use.

APPROVAL FOR EXTERNALLY PRODUCED MEDIA MATERIAL

If a partner organisation, or other external agency (government, NGO) produces media material featuring MWBP, the material must be approved by:

1. The appropriate MWBP Programme Manager/Coordinator responsible for that subject matter/country
2. The Regional Communications and Networks Coordinator and/or UNDP Team Leader

FORMAT OF MWBP MEDIA MATERIAL AND NAME USE

MWBP has an official template for the press releases (refer to the MWBP Branding Guide). This template should be used for all programme press releases. The MWBP Branding Guide should also guide the design and production of all other media materials (e.g. font style and size, logo placement, design elements etc.)

Programme information that should feature in all media materials, includes:

- The programme website (www.mekongwetlands.org)
- The programme name should be spelt out in full at least once, with subsequent references using the acronym, e.g. Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP).
- Any photos should be properly credited to the photographer. If the photo has been taken by a MWBP staff member then the credit should include the name of the staff member and the programme. For example, a standard caption will be either:

External photo credit	Photo: M.Mullins
Programme photo credit	Photo: MWBP
Programme photo credit, with name	Photo: MWBP/S.Wood
Co-branding programmes	Photo: MWBP/WWF
Co-branding programme, with name	Photo: MWBP/WWF/S.Wood

- All media material should be available in English and the National language of the country of distribution.
- The writing and editing guidelines of MWBP should be adhered to at all times, including the programme's preferred word list.
- The MWBP Branding Guide should be adhered to at all times.

FORMAT OF MEDIA MATERIAL WHEN ONE OR MORE IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS DOES NOT APPROVE MWBP CONTENT

In the instance that one or more of the implementing partners does not approve the media material produced on behalf of MWBP, the material may be distributed in the format of the approving partner, for example: if MRC and UNDP do not approve the MWBP media material for distribution then the material may only be released using the appropriate IUCN format. Alternatively, MRC and IUCN may wish to distribute material that UNDP does not approve in which case MRC and IUCN would co-brand the material but the MWBP logo could not be featured.

QUICK TIPS FOR WRITING A PRESS RELEASE (OR MEDIA MATERIAL)

Journalists received hundreds of press releases each day, so you need to think carefully about how you will make yours stand out. You also need to take into account the time pressures that the media face – they won't always have time to read the full press release. To follow is a simple format for drafting a press release:

The inverted pyramid

The news release should follow the 'inverted pyramid' structure. It tells you the most 'newsy' things first; the next most important/interesting things next; and so on, in descending order.

The lead

The lead is the first sentence of a paragraph. It 'tells the story'. Do not put minor detail in the lead – just the main fact. The lead is not a summary; the reader only needs the main plot. Try to answer the following questions in your first sentence: Who? WHAT? WHERE? WHEN?

The essentials of the story

You should answer WHY? and HOW? to give the essentials of the story, and the perspective – the reason why the story is significant. Unless these facts speak clearly for themselves (and they often don't) you have to answer the SO WHAT? question for the reader. If sometimes questions cannot be answered, you must tell the reader this – "it was not known why, or how, or who". Also, if possible, tell the reader why we don't know.

Back up

If you said that Mr X 'attacked' plan Y, you must then 'back this up' – in what way was it an attack? If you have said that Mr X denounced the plan as a lot of nonsense, you need a full 'back up' quote later to confirm.

Further information

Do you need to provide further information or more 'back up'? Write it up imagining that you are trying to shout facts to someone moving gradually out of earshot.

WHAT IS NEWSWORTHY?

Due to the fierce competition to attract media attention, it is essential that you only contact the media with “newsworthy” information. Although the topic may be extremely interesting and important to you, it may not be to the media and general public, hence you need to ensure that you topic is worthy of media attention. The following points may help you to determine this:

Actuality

Does the story deal with a recent meeting, project or is it linked to current or upcoming events?

Impact

How many people will be or are influenced and how serious is the issue?

Identification

Can the reader identify with the news or issue described? Can the story convey the importance of the news to the reader? Is it relevant to particular technical or political readers?

Surprise

Is the topic out of the ordinary (man bites ant)?

Others

- Science: is the story based on valid and reliable science?
- Network: does the news item highlight the implementing partners, working with partners or donors?
- Presentation: is a suitable photo present? Is the issue tangible and practical? Are quotes available?

RESPONDING TO MEDIA ENQUIRIES

To ensure that information provided to the media is accurate, comprehensive and complete, and that reporters have appropriate access to the best sources of information, MWBP manages all media enquiries according to the following protocol.

1. Generally, media requests should first go to the communications staff in the Regional and National offices or, in the absence of these, to the UNDP Team Leader, where staff can find out what information the reporter needs and arrange for him or her to speak with the appropriate spokesperson.
2. Sometimes a reporter will call you directly. If appropriate, you may handle the call, or you may refer the call to the communications staff. If you do give information, it is very important that you immediately notify the National Communications and Training Coordinator in your respective country or the Regional Communications and Networks Coordinator or, in the absence of such person, the UNDP Team Leader.
3. The best practice in responding to a reporter's call is to ask what the questions are, what the story is about and what the deadline is, and then call back with the information as soon as possible. This allows time to report the enquiry to your National Communications and Training Coordinator or Regional Communications and Networks Coordinator.

Points to remember when you receive a media enquiry:

- The date and time the media enquiry was made
- The title of the newspaper, magazine, radio or television station and programme details
- The reporter's name
- The reporter's contact telephone number and email address
- The reporter's deadline
- Full details of the enquiry

5. The Regional Communications and Networks Coordinator will also notify senior management of all sensitive or significant media inquiries.

6. Any MWBP staff member who feels uncertain or uncomfortable talking to the news media may skip all these steps and refer the matter directly to the National Communications and Training Coordinator or Regional Communications and Networks Coordinator.

7. The Regional Communications and Networks Coordinator may refer media inquiries directly to the appropriate staff person.

8. No media enquiry should go unanswered. MWBP communications staff are therefore relying on cooperation from MWBP technical staff in handling media requests and providing background information for media.

INTERVIEW TIPS

If you are required to give an interview on behalf of MWBP, the following tips will help you to prepare:

Know your audience

One basic rule applies to any interview, whether it is radio, TV, newspaper or magazine: know your audience. Media survive on the ability to build and maintain audiences. When you are asked to participate in an interview, ask about the audience who is likely to see, hear or read the piece. Most will be grateful that you care.

Research the reporter

In addition to knowing your audience, it is important to know something about the background of the interviewer or reporter. Reporters have opinions and attitudes about subjects and issues. These opinions influence how a subject may be treated in a printed article or broadcast interview. They definitely determine the kind of questions that will be asked. Some reporters and interviewers aggressively pursue their subjects; many more are low-key and simply want to explore a topic.

For these reasons, it is important to do your homework before the interview: scan some back issues of a newspaper or magazines, monitor TV/radio shows paying special attention to the host's approach to the guests, the tone, the style of questioning and attitudes toward issues. If the format is a debate or panel discussion, study the way the moderator handles varying points of view or moves the conversation from one panelist to another.

Provide background information

It is to your benefit to offer background information to the reporter before the interview. If the interview is set up at the last minute and there is no time to provide the information to the reporter, offer to supply it immediately after the interview. The result will be a more accurate story. Be sure to read any material thoroughly before sending it to a reporter so that you are familiar with the information and agree with any statements made.

Set objectives

It is important that the interview is a two-way process: 1. The reporter received the information they need to satisfy the audience; and 2. You are able to communicate key messages related to the topic. The best way to ensure that the reporter will be satisfied is explained in the points above, however it can often be difficult to communicate your key messages while working with a report and a set timeframe, so it is essential that you prepare two to three key messages prior to the interview. These messages should relate to the priority information that you wish to communicate, and you should try to incorporate the messages into all your responses – by repeating the messages it will help to reinforce the information. Write the key messages down, practice them and ensure you have communicated the messages before the end of the interview.

General Dos and Don'ts

- Do not say anything you do not want published. There is no such thing as “off the record”. A reporter can always attribute your comments to “a source close to the subject”.

- Do not speak “off top of your head”. Be prepared. Have all facts, figures and references at hand.
- Anticipate key questions and have answers ready. Know the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE and WHY of the subject.
- Answer questions concisely and in non-technical terms. Make points quickly, clearly, sharply and briefly.
- Use concrete, not abstract, words. Be specific. When possible, cite statistics rather than using generalities such as “lots of” and “many”. The use of case studies and examples to illustrate a point is helpful in the interview.
- If you are asked for information or opinions in an area in which you do not have sufficient experience or expertise, direct the reporter to a more appropriate source of information.
- If you promise a reporter additional information, or names and phone numbers of other sources, follow up immediately by telephone or email.
- Do not be a salesperson. Your job is to answer questions with well-thought-out answers substantiated by facts. A friendly but business-like approach is the best with media.
- If you do not have the answer to a question, don’t bluff. Tell the reporter you do not have the information at hand, but offer to supply it shortly afterwards by telephone or email.
- If there is a question that ethics or confidentiality prohibits you from answering, say, “Unfortunately I am not in a position to comment at this time,” and then state the reason why.
- Do not give misleading information under any circumstances.
- Do not say anything that may be interpreted as an attempt to coerce, influence or control the content of the article. Avoid requesting copy approval or asking the reporter what he will do with the information. Instead, offer to make yourself available after the interview should the reporter have additional questions.

Interview styles

Most interviews will go smoothly. Your interviewer will be interested in your topic and will know enough about the subject to carry on a lively conversation. However, you may occasionally run into interviewers who fall into other categories. A host may be hostile no matter what you say or do. A reporter may know nothing about you or your topic and may ask ignorant questions. All can be dealt with once you identify the type of interviewer they are.

Machine-Gun Interviewer

The machine-gun interviewer is the one who fires so many questions at once that you don’t know which question to answer first. By the time you have begun answering one, another three have been fired at you. In this case, suggest that the host has already asked several questions and politely inquire which one he/she would prefer you address first. Or, pick the question you would most like to answer and begin with that one. Insist on your prerogative to provide a complete answer.

Interrupter

The interrupter constantly breaks in on your answers with additional questions or comments. This pattern throws you off your main point. In this situation, let the interviewer finish his/her question and inform him/her that you will address it shortly.

Then continue. A good way to resume is with the statement, "As I was saying..." Another tactic is to ignore the interruption, finish what you were saying, then ask the interviewer to repeat the question.

Hostile Questioner

The hostile questioner may confront you with major charges or serious allegations. These must be dealt with as they arise, before going on to other questions. You cannot leave major charges or serious allegations on the record.

Know-Nothing Interviewer

The know-nothing interviewer has no inkling about your subject, has no opinions and has not conducted any research or even reviewed the background literature you provided in advance of your appearance. **Beware:** this type of interviewer is more common than you may think. There are many interviewers who try to "wing it". Your job is to identify that style, grasp control of the interview and lead the interviewer through it. In fact, you have the capability of making this type of interviewer look very good in front of his/her audience, and you have an open road for achieving your communications objectives.

Big-Time Star

The big-time star may be dreadful. The interviewer is confident that he/she is the reason everyone is watching or listening to the programme. Most of all, the interviewer likes to hear his/her own voice and display his/her knowledge. You'll have to fight to get air time.

Despite these occasional, difficult types, most interviewers are competent and helpful and want you to present yourself and your information well. By being prepared for the worst, you will usually be pleasantly surprised.

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

NB: No MWBP staff member has the authority to speak in regard to a controversial issue, unless given direct approval by the Regional Communications and Networks Coordinator and/or the UNDP Team Leader.

Due to the complex nature of MWBP and the diversity of the programme's work, the programme may, at times, be involved in, or be perceived to be involved in, controversial issues within the region. It is imperative that MWBP be proactive in identifying and addressing controversial issues. To effectively and professionally deal with controversial issues, the following simple procedure has been devised and appropriate spokes people appointed:

Dealing with controversial issues:

If you are approached by media in regard to a controversial issue (see MWBP media spokes persons below), you should respond in the following manner: "Unfortunately I am not in a position to comment on this topic, however there are other people working on the programme who may be able to assist you," and then ask the media to contact either:

- the appointed spokes person for that topic (see list below);
- your National Communications and Training Coordinator;
- the Regional Communications and Networks Coordinator; or
- the UNDP Team Leader.

Identifying controversial issues:

As the programme matures new and different issues may become relevant to the work of the programme. If you suspect that a new issue may be controversial for the programme, you should contact either:

- your National Communications and Training Coordinator;
- the Regional Communications and Networks Coordinator; or
- the UNDP Team Leader.

MWBP MEDIA SPOKES PERSONS

Topic	Spokes person	Contact details
MWBP Cambodia – general	NPC – Mr Sok Vong	Tel: +855 12 852 904 Ext 144 Email: sokvong.mwbp@online.com.kh
MWBP Lao PDR – general	NPC – Mr Singha Ounniyom	Tel: +856 20 9900 708 Email: singha_ounniyom@yahoo.com
MWBP Thailand - general	NPC – TBA	
MWBP Vietnam – general	NPC – Mrs Nguyen Hong Phuong	Tel: + 84 91 303 4410 Email: nphuong.mwbp@nea.gov.vn
Flagship species	Alvin Lopez	Tel: +856 21 216 401 Ext 114 Email: Alvin.mwbp@iucnlao.org
MRC in MWBP	Refer to Virginia Addison	Tel: +856 21 63263 Ext 1122 Email: Virginia@mrcmekong.org
IUCN in MWBP	Richard Friend	Tel: +856 21 216 401 Ext 116 Email: Richard.mwbp@iucnlao.org
UNDP in MWBP	Peter-John Meynell	Tel: +856 21 216 401 Ext 109 Email: peterjohn.meynell@undp.org
Livelihoods	Richard Friend	Tel: +856 21 216 401 Ext 116 Email: Richard.mwbp@iucnlao.org
Biodiversity	Alvin Lopez	Tel: +856 21 216 401 Ext 114 Email: Alvin.mwbp@iucnlao.org
Economics	Madhu Bhattarai	Tel: +856 21 216 401 Ext Email: madhu.mwbp@iucnlao.org
Endangered species	Alvin Lopez	Tel: +856 21 216 401 Ext 114 Email: Alvin.mwbp@iucnlao.org

Topic	Spokes person	Contact details
Alien species	Alvin Lopez	Tel: +856 21 216 401 Ext 114 Email: Alvin.mwbp@iucnlao.org
Dams	Peter-John Meynell	Tel: +856 21 216 401 Ext 109 Email: peterjohn.meynell@undp.org mekongwetlands@iucnlao.org
Ramsar	Alvin Lopez	Tel: +856 21 216 401 Ext 114 Email: Alvin.mwbp@iucnlao.org
Wetlands	Peter-John, Richard, Alvin	Details as listed above
Flooding	Peter-John Meynell	Tel: +856 21 216 401 Ext 109 Email: peterjohn.meynell@undp.org mekongwetlands@iucnlao.org
Drought	Peter-John Meynell	Tel: +856 21 216 401 Ext 109 Email: peterjohn.meynell@undp.org mekongwetlands@iucnlao.org
Wildlife trade / TRAFFIC	Peter-John or Alvin	Tel: +856 21 216 401 Ext 109 Email: peterjohn.meynell@undp.org mekongwetlands@iucnlao.org
Education	Phin Sopheap	Tel: +856 21 216 401 Ext 104 Email: sopheap.mwbp@iucnlao.org
Cambodia Government	NPD – HE. Lonh Heal	Tel: +855 23 222 439 Email: molelab@online.com.kh
Lao PDR Government	Douangkham Singhanouvong	Tel: +856 20 550 7201 Email: douangkham_s@yahoo.co.uk
Thailand Government	Kasemsun Chinnavaso	Tel: + 66 1174 1336 Email: chinnavaso@onep.go.th
Vietnam Government	Tran Hong Ha	Tel: + 844 9 423 899 Email: tha@nea.gov.vn
Other / Unknown	Sarah Wood	Tel: +856 21 216 401 Ext 105 Email: sarah.mwbp@iucnlao.org

THE 5 F'S OF MEDIA RELATIONS

Good relations with the media mean good relations with journalists. Below are the points to remember in your dealing with journalists:

1. Fast

Respect journalists' deadlines. Return calls as pledged and always ensure you meet the agreed deadline. An unreturned call is an incalculable 'faux pas'.

2. Factual

Be factual. But make the facts interesting. Journalists appreciate facts told/stated with some literary flourish.

3. Frank

Be candid. Never mislead journalists. Be as open as possible and respond to their questions. Most journalists will respect a confidential source – as long as you provide a good explanation.

4. Fair

Be fair to journalists if you expect them to be fair to you. Favouring one news outlet consistently will lose you the confidence of others.

5. Friendly

Like everyone else, journalists appreciate courtesy. Remember their names. Read what they write. Listen to what they say. Know their interests. Thank them when they cover your issues.

THE LAST WORD

Working with the media can be a highly rewarding process, however, it takes time and effort on both sides. By using the MWBP Media Guide, the programme can ensure that all staff are working in a professional and consistent manner with the media and assisting to strengthen the programme's relationship with the media.

The MWBP Media Guide has been produced to help guide your relations with the media, however at any time if you feel uncomfortable dealing with the media, or are unsure how to proceed the MWBP Communications Team are always here to help.

Good luck!

MWBP Communications Team
April 2005