

Observations on the participation of RCA Member States and National Project Counterparts in Project Management Meetings

A discussion paper from Australia

1. Introduction

It has become a standard part of the design of RCA projects that they have Project Management Meetings to review the progress of the project, at both the regional and national level, in order to contribute to enhancing networking and cooperation at both levels. The implied wisdom is that these meetings will provide additional stimuli for sustainability, increasing the involvement of Member States in the project management, providing feedback to the Project Lead Country Coordinator (PLCC) and the Agency on the project performance and promoting additional opportunities for TCDC. It then goes without saying that full participation of the Member States and their nominated National Project Counterparts (NPCs) in these planning meetings is important, if these planned benefits are going to be realised. It is also the case that, if Member States do not support these meetings (either by their NPCs not participating or having no representation at all) then it is doubtful that the benefits can be achieved. The implementation of the project management meetings has a cost not only with respect to the total budget for the RCA projects and the overall programme, but also on the number of events that can be implemented annually.

An analysis of the current performance of the project management meetings has been undertaken to ascertain the current level of Member State and NPC participation, so that any potential deficiencies can be identified and recommendations made for possible improvements in the coming RCA programme for the 2012/13 TC cycle.

The current RCA programme consists of the following 14 projects:

- RAS/5/045 - Improvement of Crop Quality and Stress Tolerance for Sustainable Crop Production Using Mutation Techniques and Biotechnology (RCA) (1st year of approval 2007)
- RAS/5/046 - Novel Applications of Food Irradiation Technology for Improving Socioeconomic Development (RCA) (1st year of approval 2007)
- RAS/5/050 - Enhancing Sanitary and Phytosanitary Treatment of Regional Products for Export by Irradiation (RCA) (1st year of approval 2009)
- RAS/6/038 - Strengthening Medical Physics through Education and Training (RCA) (1st year of approval 2003)
- RAS/6/049 - Strengthening Clinical Applications of PET in RCA Member States (RCA) (1st year of approval 2007)
- RAS/6/053 - Improving Image Based Radiation Therapy for Common Cancers in the RCA Region (RCA) (1st year of approval 2009)
- RAS/7/015 - Characterization and Source Identification of Particulate Air Pollution in the Asian Region (RCA) (1st year of approval 2007)
- RAS/7/016 - Establishing a Benchmark for Assessing the Radiological Impact of Nuclear Power Activities on the Marine Environment in Asia Pacific Region (RCA) (1st year of approval 2007)
- RAS/7/019 - Harmonizing Nuclear and Isotopic Techniques for Marine Pollution Management at the Regional Level (RCA) (1st year of approval 2009)

- RAS/8/108 - Assessing Trends in Freshwater Quality Using Environmental Isotopes and Chemical Techniques for Improved Resource Management (RCA) (1st year of approval 2009)
- RAS/8/109 - Supporting Radiation Processing of Polymeric Materials for Agricultural Applications and Environmental Remediation (RCA) (1st year of approval 2009)
- RAS/8/110 - Applying Advanced Digital Industrial Radiology and Computed Tomography in Industry and Civil Engineering (RCA) (1st year of approval 2009)
- RAS/8/111 - Diagnosing Industrial Multiphase Systems by Process Visualization using Radiotracers and Sealed Sources (RCA) (1st year of approval 2009)
- RAS/9/042 - Sustainability of Regional Radiation Protection Infrastructure (RCA) (1st year of approval 2007)

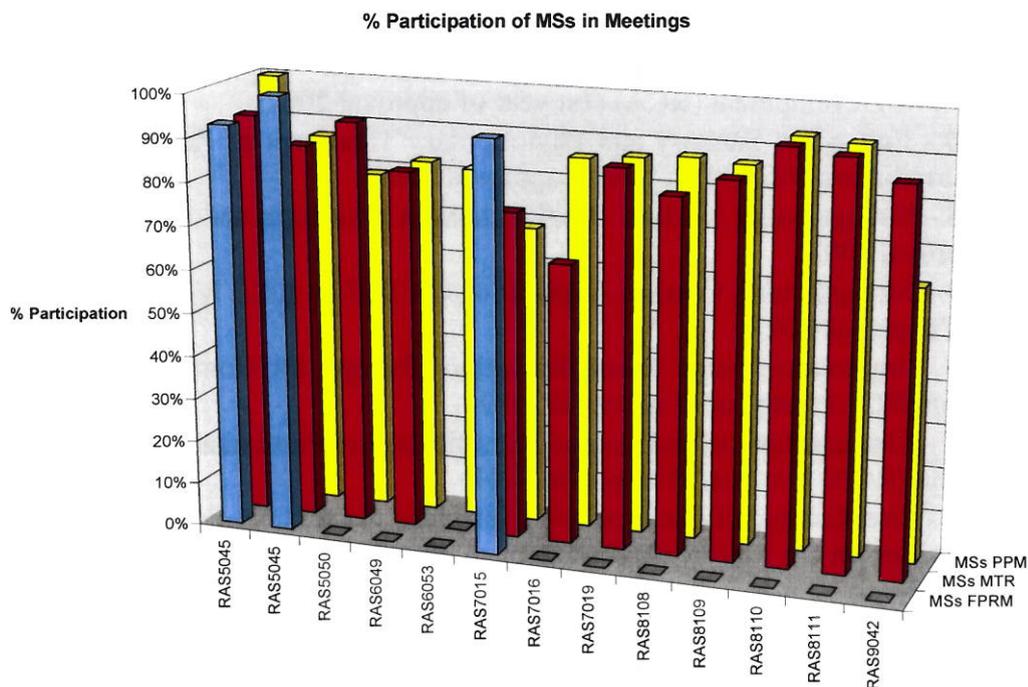
The participation of the Member States and their nominated National Project Counterparts in 13 of the 14 project has been analysed. Project RAS/6/038 has not been included since it is the only project first approved in 2003. All the others were first approved in either 2007 or 2009 and represent a more homogenous data set.

2. Results

2.1 Participation of Member States in the 13 Individual Projects

Figure 1 shows the percentage participation of the RCA Member States in Project Planning, Mid-term Review and Final Project Review Meetings. Across the 13 projects the average participation for the three type of meeting is as follows: Project Planning – 79%; Mid-term review 78%; and. Final Project Review Meetings 96%. In practical terms, this is equivalent to 3 Member States not attending the Project Planning and Mid-term Review Meetings and 1 Member State not attending the Final Project Review Meeting.

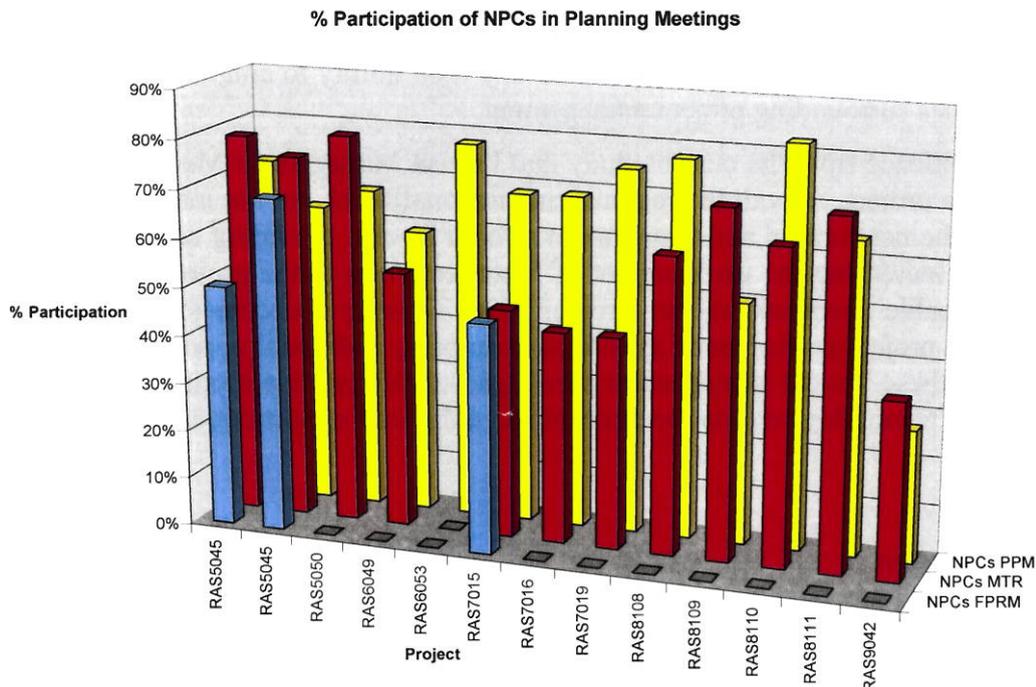
Figure 1



2.2 Participation of the nominated National Project Counterparts in the 13 Individual Projects

The percentage participation of the nominated National Project Counterparts in Project Planning, Mid-term Review and Final Project Review Meetings is less than the participation by the Member States. Figure 2 shows the percentage participation of the National Project Counterparts in Project Planning, Mid-term Review and Final Project Review Meetings. Across the 13 projects the average participation for the three type of meeting is as follows: Project Planning – 63%; Mid-term review 58%; and. Final Project Review Meetings 55%. In practical terms this is equivalent to only slightly more than half of the nominated National Project Counterparts attending the Project Planning, Mid-term Review and the Final Project Review Meetings.

Figure 2



The absence of such a significant number of NPCs from these meeting raises concerns, both in respect of the NPCs' commitment to the project, and also the cost benefit of these meetings for the effective implementation of the projects, regional and national sustainability and TCDC. The number of participants attending these meetings that were not the designated NPCs raises concerns about whether representation was at an appropriate level to ensure an effective management meeting. The statistics on this for the 28 meetings undertaken by the 13 projects are as follows:

- Number of non-NPCs less than or equal to 50% of the number of NPCs attending - 14.
- Number of non-NPCs between 50% and 100% of the number of NPCs attending – 6.
- Number of non-NPCs equal to or greater that the number of NPCs attending – 8.

Thus half the projects would appear to have a level of non-NPCs attending that may impact negatively on the effectiveness of the meeting and thereby impose a significant cost penalty that may be hard to justify.

3. Conclusion

There is a significant cost associated with the adoption of a project management regime as a standard design component of an RCA project. The costs and benefits need to be well understood and demonstrated to ensure that this is a justified use of limited financial resources and that this is the best way of achieving the stated goals.

Analysis of 13 of the 14 currently active RCA projects shows that while the majority of RCA MSs do have participants in the project planning meetings, the participation by their nominated NPC is at a lower level with, on average, only slightly more than half participating. Non-NPC participation in these meetings is very variable but half of the meetings have had their level of participation equal to 50% or more of the numbers of NPCs attending. There is then a major question concerning the ability of the non-NPCs to function adequately and make a meaningful contribution to the meeting deliberations and outcomes. As present there is no clarity about the status of the non-NPCs and their ability to contribute in a meaningful way to the issues surrounding project management.

There is no evidence from the current study that Project Management Meetings to review the progress of the project, at both the regional and national level, are not making a contribution to enhancing the networking and cooperation at both levels, providing additional stimuli for sustainability, increasing the involvement of Member States in the project management and providing valuable feedback to the Project Lead Country Coordinator (PLCC) and the Agency on the project performance as well as promoting additional opportunities for TCDC. It may be that these Project Management Meetings actually provide more useful insights than the mandatory 6 monthly reports, because of the enhanced opportunities for discussion and dialogue.

4. Recommendation

It is recommended that National Representatives consider the following improvements to the current arrangements for implementation in the RCA programme in 2012/13:

- In addition to nominating an NPC for each project also nominate an alternate NPC, who would have an appropriate range of skills and experience to be able to carry out the full scope of tasks attached to the NPC role;
- To the maximum degree possible only nominate the NPC or the alternate to attend and participate in the project management meetings; and
- If the NPC or the alternate cannot participate, the nomination of a non-NPC representative to these meetings should be restricted to someone who is a Member of the National Team, has the appropriate range of skills and experience and has been fully briefed by the NPC.