

Agenda Item 9: Any other business

Analysis of Responses to Post-Meeting Questionnaire 2002

Submitted by: Secretariat



ASCOBANS

NOTE:
IN THE INTERESTS OF ECONOMY, DELEGATES ARE KINDLY REMINDED TO BRING THEIR OWN COPIES OF THESE DOCUMENTS TO THE MEETING

**9th Meeting of the Advisory Committee to ASCOBANS
Hindås, Sweden, 10 - 12 June 2002**

Analysis of Responses to Post-Meeting Questionnaire

Introduction

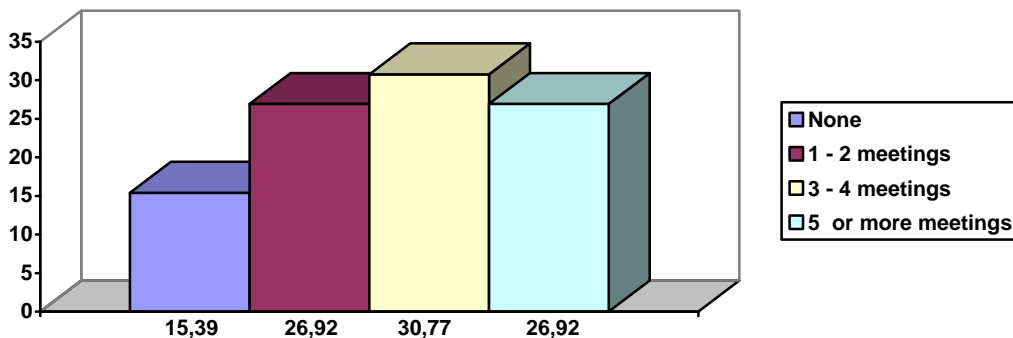
On 26 August 2002, the ASCOBANS Secretariat distributed a questionnaire to the participants of the Ninth Meeting of the Advisory Committee to ASCOBANS, asking them to evaluate the meeting, the venue, the programme and, of course, the performance of the organisers.

The questionnaire was distributed by e-mail to the 41 (non-Secretariat) participants. A total of 26 forms were returned. Some respondents did not reply to all the questions, and some questions provoked multiple responses.

We would not claim this to be a professional survey, but we do hope the replies still paint a relatively accurate picture of how participants viewed AC9, and would like to offer this brief analysis of the outcome. The Secretariat found the result of this inquiry both enlightening and encouraging. We will do our best to continually improve our performance and to follow the suggestions of participants wherever practicable.

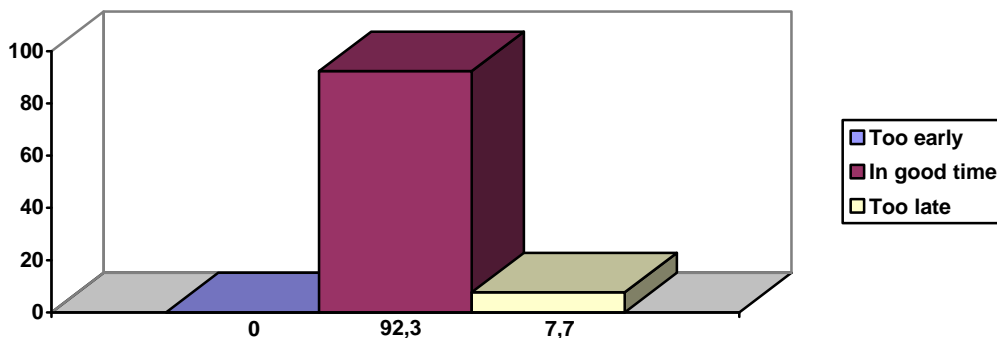
Question 1:

How many ASCOBANS AC meetings have you attended previously?

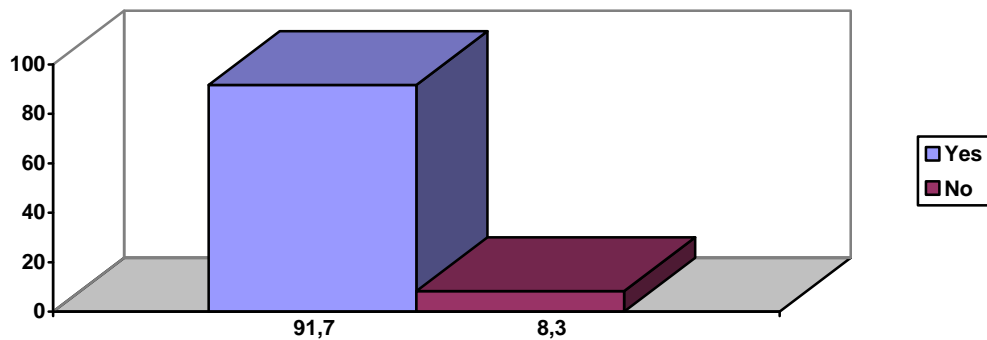


Question 2:

Did the invitation reach you in time?

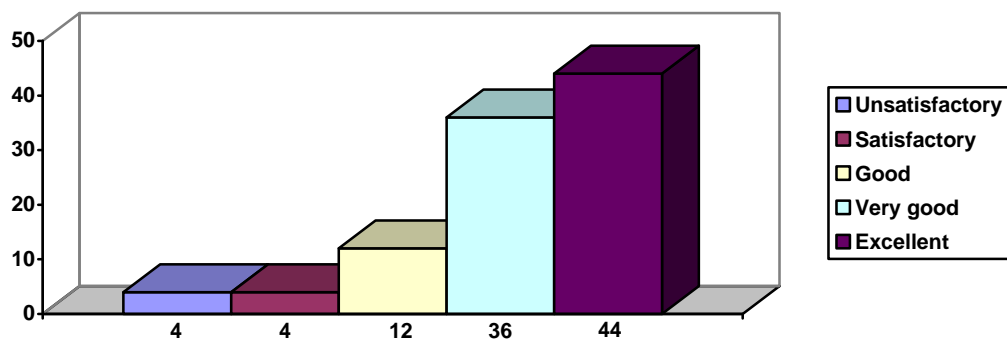


Question 3:
Did the invitation contain all the information you needed?

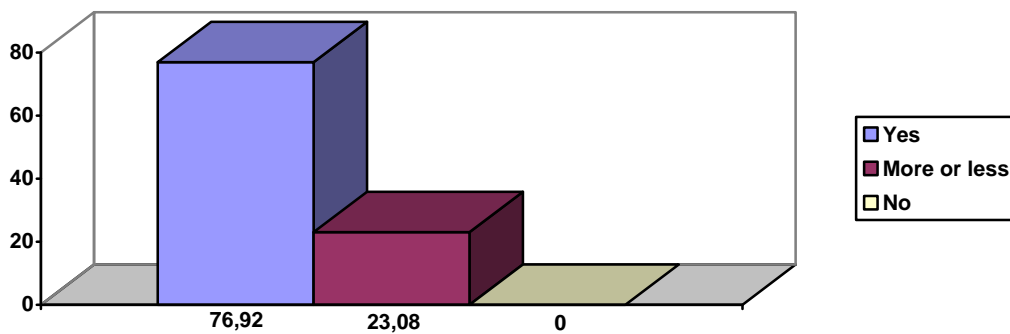


Comments:
 One respondent would have appreciated more detailed travel information, another would have liked information about accommodation options for participants arriving a day earlier.

Question 4:
How did you rate communication with the Secretariat before the meeting?

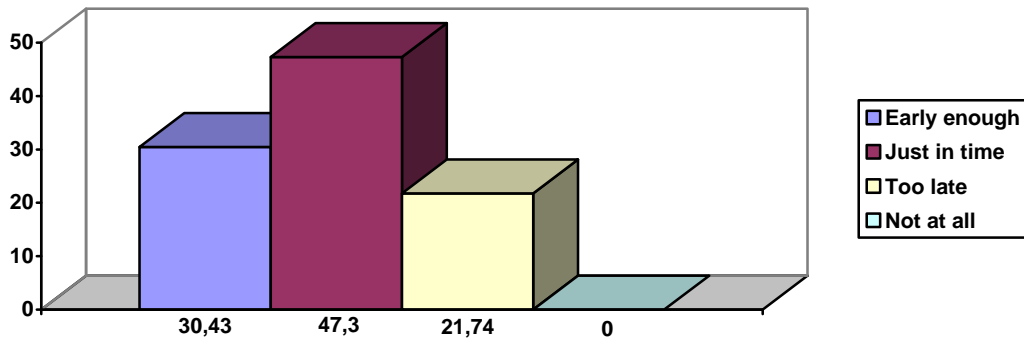


Question 5:
Did the Secretariat provide all the information you needed about the meeting?

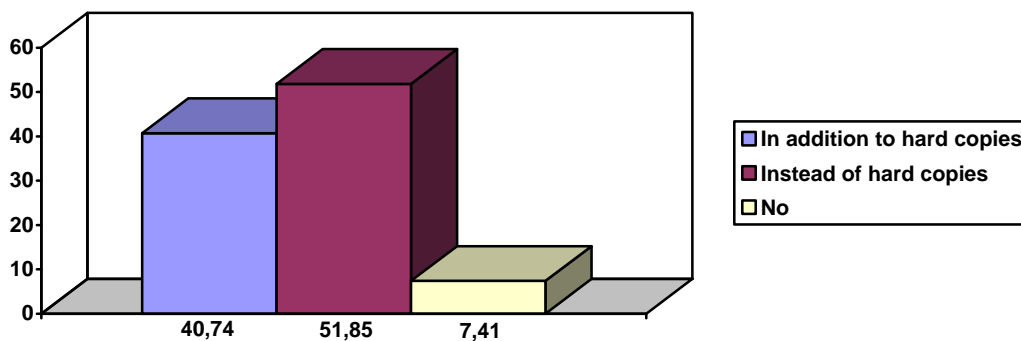


Comments:
 Two participants mentioned that some documents had been missing.

Question 6:
When did you receive the meeting documents?

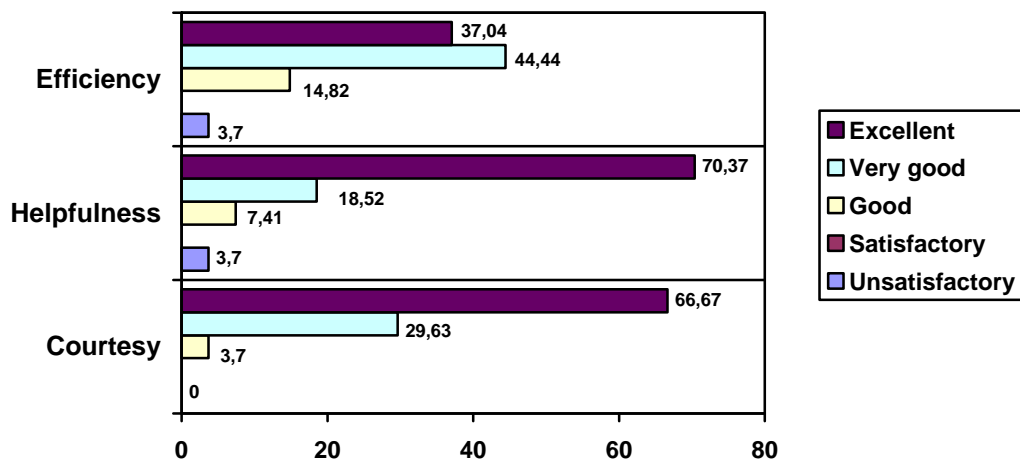


Question 7:
Would you like to receive electronic copies of documents?



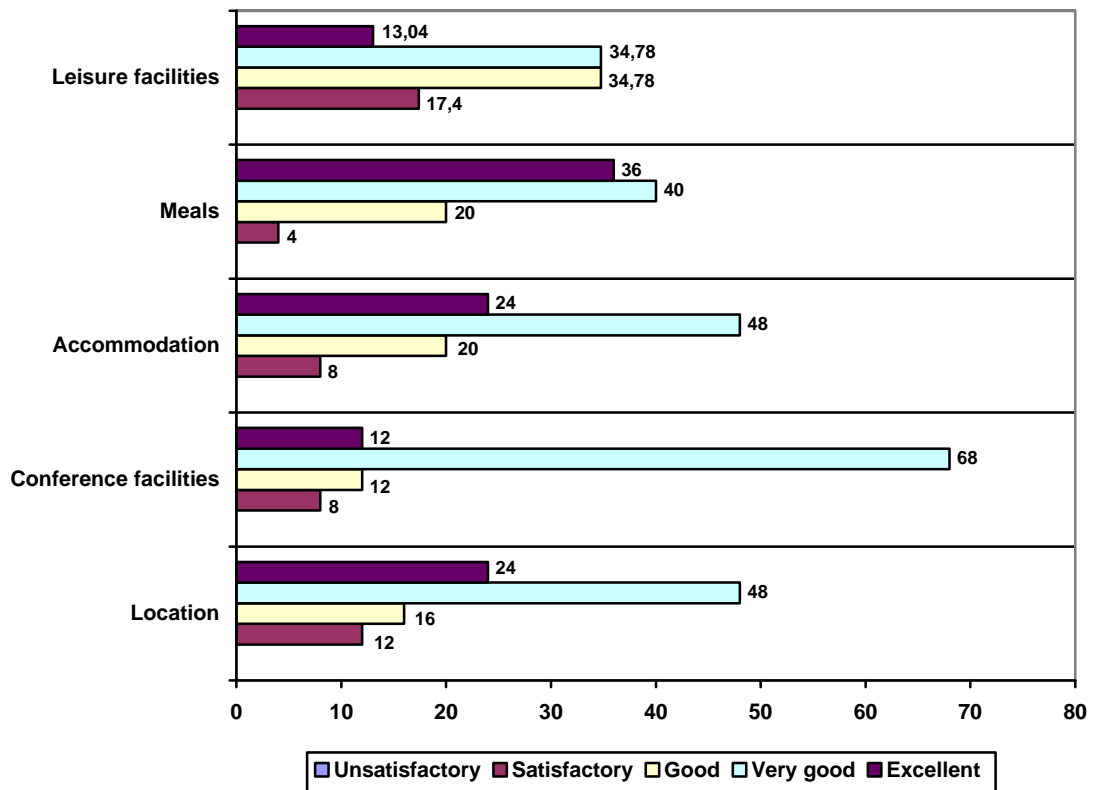
Three comments were received, i.e. that documents must be in a format enabling easy printing, that paper copies should nevertheless be available at the meeting, and that documents could be made available on the ASCOBANS website, possibly with password access.

Question 8:
Please rate the overall performance of the Secretariat in preparing the meeting



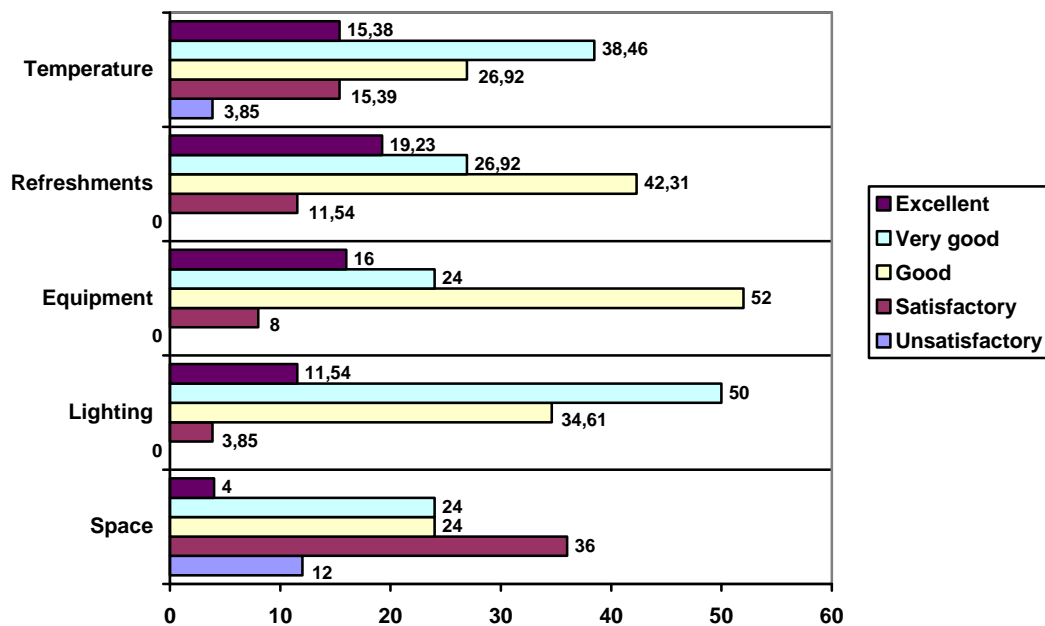
One respondent commented that all documents should be distributed in advance of the meeting, another that not everything needed to be copied and distributed (e.g. Rules of Procedure).

Question 9:
Please rate the conference venue



Two respondents rated the Hindås venue "too expensive", two more felt it was "expensive but good". One participant felt more consideration should be given to vegetarian meal options, another commented that there had been insufficient information about the leisure facilities available.

Question 10:
Please rate the conference room

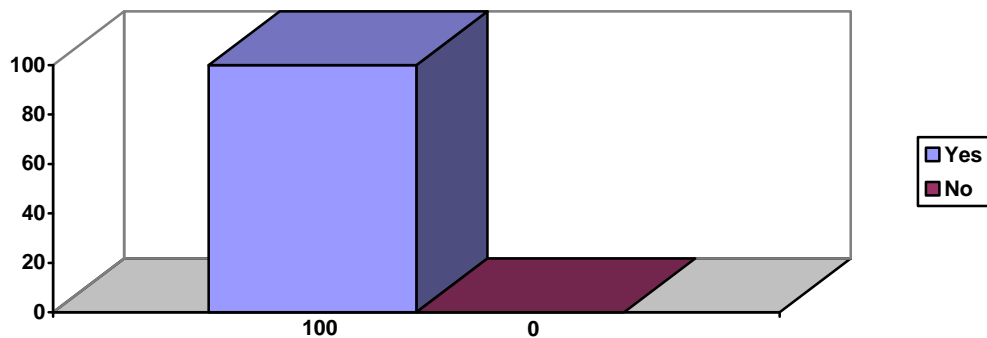


Five comments were received regarding the space and seating arrangements in the meeting room. It was the general view that a round table arrangement would have been more conducive to discussion, that the tables were too small and the limited space was a problem.

One participant mentioned the delay caused by projectors etc. not being ready for use when needed, another that two photocopiers should have been available. Others commented that the names on badges should be in larger type, and that the meeting room was too warm.

Question 11:

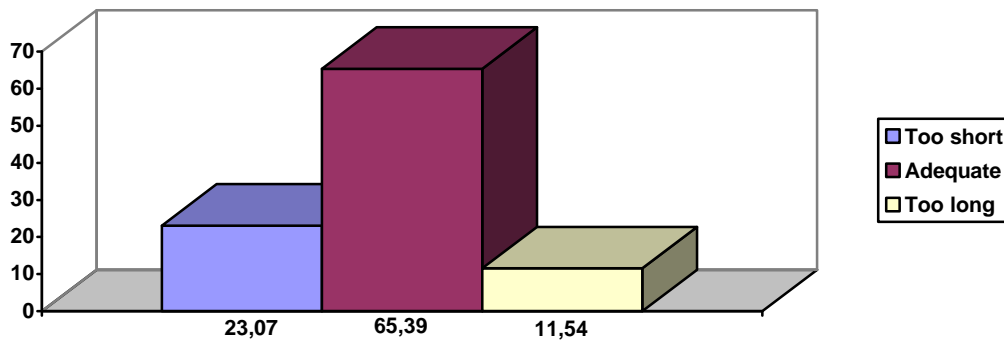
Did you consider the "pigeon holes" a good way of distributing meeting documents?



While everyone was in favour of these, six respondents pointed out that, to avoid confusion, the labels on the pigeon holes should be absolutely unambiguous.

Question 12:

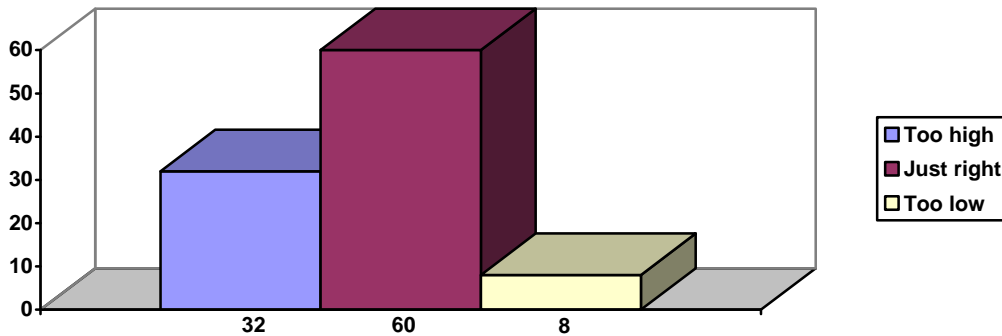
Do you consider a three-day meeting too short, adequate or too long?



One respondent commented that long conferences at expensive venues such as this pose a problem for NGOs.

Question 13:

Did you consider the number of items on the Agenda of AC9 too high, just right or too low?

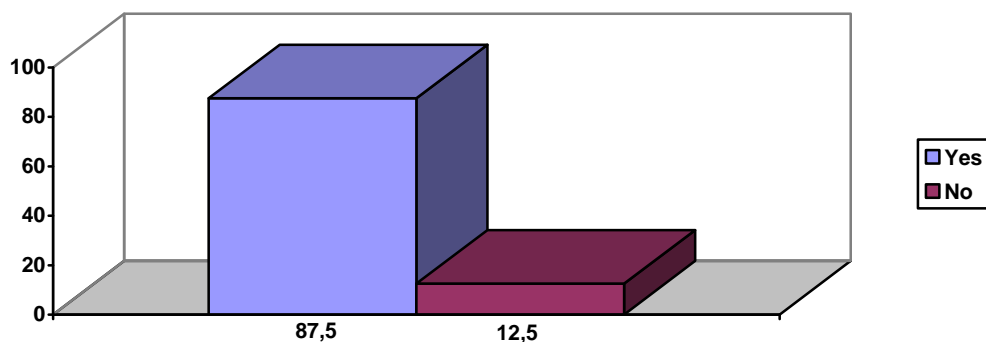


A number of concrete suggestions were offered as to how the agenda could have been improved:

- A greater proportion of time should be spent on specific issues (with appropriate advanced circulation of specialist papers, invited experts etc). This would help to progress issues more productively (e.g. bycatch in 2001, the Baltic in 2002). More routine business would need to be dealt with more quickly.
- In this case an extra day to finalise the Jastarnia Plan would have been useful.
- The meeting should not need to be cut short to allow some participants to leave early.
- Some important agenda items were not given sufficient plenary discussion time.
- More scientific papers on major conservation issues should be solicited, and longer debating time devoted to these.
- One should aim at a better balance between plenary and working group sessions.
- A list of priority items is suggested, with discussion of other issues if time allows.

Question 14:

Are you in favour of excursions/field trips during AC meetings?



Of the 24 people who responded to this question, 21 were in favour and only three against field trips or excursions.

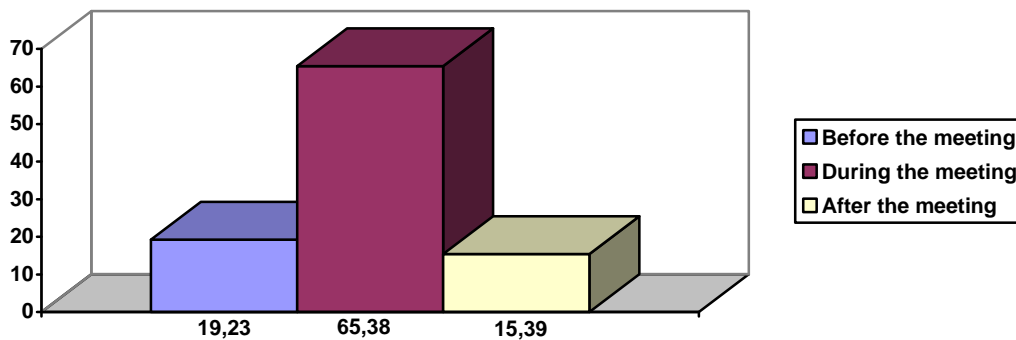
Question 15:

If you are in favour, how much time should be devoted to the excursion?

Almost all those who commented felt that an excursion should not last more than half a day (or an afternoon plus evening). Two respondents felt it should be a real "field" trip, or at least ASCOBANS-related. Two felt that it should not take up too much meeting time, one stressing, however, that an excursion could be a useful time for participants to discuss some of the issues raised in the meeting in an informal context.

Question 16:

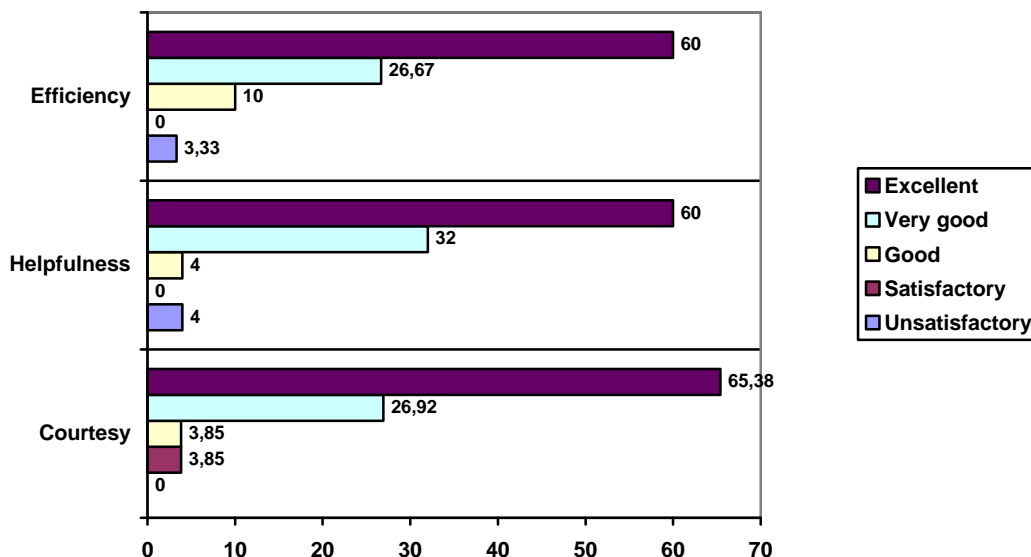
When should the excursion take place?



Five respondents voted for "before", 17 for "during" and four for "after the meeting".

Question 17:

Please rate the overall performance of the Secretariat during the meeting



All three comments made here related to the minutes of the meeting, i.e. the draft of the final report. One suggested that this should be ready sooner, and that Secretariat staff should possibly forego the excursion in order to achieve this, another felt that sufficient time should be allowed for participants to read the report before it was discussed, while the third stressed that the report should be thoroughly edited before being presented to the plenary - where discussion should then be on "fundamental questions" only.

Question 18:

Do you have any other suggestions as to how future meetings of the Advisory Committee could be optimised?

Various suggestions were received, for example

- that as the issues discussed are often of a scientific nature, a more scientifically-based meeting could work much more efficiently;
- that working groups could be more productive with additional prior preparation, e.g. working group chairs could be asked to set out and circulate proposed aims in advance, including a structure for discussion and a reminder to prospective participants of previous undertakings and relevant developments on the issue; this would allow people to come prepared, armed with necessary information;
- that meetings should be timed to avoid the winter season to facilitate travel;
- that because Parties often fail to deliver information for meetings, a letter be sent reminding coordinators of outstanding tasks:
- that, where possible, Chair, rapporteurs and members of working groups should be decided before the meeting;
- that the meeting should be extended to four days, reserving the last day for the adoption of the final version of the report;
- that decisions are very important, but so are creating synergies and new developments (this was possible);
- that fewer items on the agenda would allow time for deeper discussions and for the meetings to be slightly shorter.

One respondent expressed concern that currently the Advisory Committee meetings

- involve less scientific advice and more political and bureaucratic debate. This is mainly the result of the paucity of cetacean scientists invited/attending. This is a great shame and means that they become almost mini-Meetings of the Parties, which surely is not what the Advisory Committee was established for. One way to help overcome this if there are no funds to invite particular scientists (and it is worth mentioning that ACCOBAMS has provided a limited budget for this), would be to organise a meeting at least every two years to follow on from the Annual Conference of the European Cetacean Society at which 80% of marine mammal scientists from Europe attend.

And two had only one comment to make:

- "You are doing the best!"
- "You are doing a great job!"