

MODIFIED CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING

A TWS POLICY DOCUMENT

Adopted at P&P meeting, 10/11/00.

[consensus_policy001110.doc, David Wanless, 10/11/00]

Background

Consensus decision making is a powerful, dynamic and revolutionary approach to making decisions. It has been successfully used by The Wilderness Society since the Franklin Campaign in the early years of the Society.

Unlike many other decision making mechanisms it is a highly participatory form of decision making. However, it is important that all participants have a shared understanding of consensus. This will result in good decisions and a clear and efficient process.

Understanding and effectively utilising consensus decision making takes time and experience. It is a constant learning process for all involved.

There is a considerable literature on the subject of consensus decision making. For example, see the fact sheet 'Consensus Decision Making: How To Use It', by Andrew Donovan, 1992.

Generally speaking, consensus is the preferred methodology of decision making within TWS. However, there are both strengths and limitations to consensus procedures. While there is broad agreement on issues, consensus works well but inevitably there will be times when agreement is simply not possible through consensus. Frequently this will occur when discussing matters of great importance to the organisation as a whole within a time constraint. The question then arises - where consensus cannot be reached, where there are no generally favourable opinions or an agreed decision, where there is division, how are decisions to be made?

In order to ensure that important decisions are not bogged down in endless debate and discussion, a suitable trigger for suspension of the unanimity principle and reversion to a majority decision is necessary in the design of consensus models. Consequently TWS has adopted a modified consensus model which will lead to quicker decision making while at the same time ensuring adequate debate and that a very clear majority is required.

Policy

Except where specifically prescribed otherwise all decisions made at any meeting (including committee meetings) within TWS shall be made using the following modified consensus model.

1. Conduct Of Meetings

1.1 Business at any meeting shall be dealt with as follows.

- (a) Wherever possible, the nature of the business of the meeting, and any proposed resolutions ("proposals") for discussion, will have been circulated to all participants well in advance to allow proper consideration.

- (b) A Facilitator shall be appointed from amongst the meeting participants, or externally, by agreement of the participants. The Facilitator is responsible for chairing and conducting the meeting.
- (c) All agenda items requiring a decision shall be presented in the form of a proposal for discussion, wherever possible to have been posted with the notice of meeting.
- (d) An item of business shall be placed on the agenda of a meeting and the method and allotted time for dealing with the item shall be agreed upon.
- (e) Sufficient time shall be given in debate, with full and open discussion of different views where practical, to allow amendments to be formulated and a consensus of opinion to emerge.
- (f) Where there is general agreement on an original or an amended proposal a mover and seconder from amongst the meeting participants shall be sought by the Facilitator and the motion shall be put for decision.

1.2 Meeting procedures shall be adopted:

- (a) that give the mover of a proposition sufficient time to address the matter for resolution.
- (b) that give subsequent speakers equal opportunity to express views on and to question the proposition.
- (c) that guarantee the right of speakers to be heard.
- (d) that set and extend in a particular instance the time permitted for discussion.
- (e) that ensure that the matter at hand is addressed through open and rational deliberation and that matters are resolved.
- (f) that facilitate consensus amongst the meeting participants.

1.3 Any proposal thus arising at any meeting shall be decided after reasonable consideration by a motion passed according to the process contained in Rule 2 "Consensus Decisions and Voting".

2 Consensus Decisions and Voting

- 2.1 On a show of hands or on a poll every meeting participant shall have one vote only. All votes shall be given personally and not by proxy.
- 2.2 Wherever possible, decisions shall be made by consensus (unanimously).
- 2.3 Where agreement can't be reached unanimously, consideration is to be given to deferring the decision and subjecting the issue to further debate or handing the matter to a suitably constituted committee or working group who can work in detail through the issues and recommend solutions. This process can diffuse the pressure involved in the issues. If this is successful then a motion can be adopted and passed by informed consensus.
- 2.4 However if the decision can't be delayed then the "trigger mechanism" is activated in the following sequence:
 - (a) a procedural vote to suspend consensus is called for and is seconded,
 - (b) a three quarters majority (75%) is required to suspend consensus,
 - (c) a motion is then put and seconded,
 - (d) the motion is debated,
 - (e) the subsequent vote on the motion before the meeting will be set at a three quarters majority (75%). If this vote is successful the motion is considered accepted by modified consensus.

[ends]