

# NATURE SOCIETY (SINGAPORE) - OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES

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## **Exco, Council, Special Interest Groups & Committees**

1.1. The Executive Committee (hereinafter Exco) and the Council are distinct entities. The Exco is the governing body of the Society.

1.2. The Council is made up of Exco plus Chairpersons of Special Interest Groups and Committees (hereinafter SIG/Cs), plus co-opted members. (For more on SIGs and Cs, see 1.8 and 1.9 below.)

1.3. The Council is representative of the Society's varied interests and its role is of a consultative nature. It acts as a forum to enable Exco and all the various SIG/Cs to keep each other informed of the various interests and matters each is engaged in or proposes to engage in.

1.4. The Council conducts its affairs by discussion and consensus. Where consensus is not achieved, the issue is referred to Exco for decision.

1.5. As much of Society business as possible is discussed and decided at joint Exco Council Meetings, and on the NSS Council e-loop (Google group), as a practical way to keep Council and Exco Members connected and informed.

1.6. Joint Exco Council Meetings normally take place on the second Tuesday of each month. A Chairperson of an SIG/C can send a nominated representative from their SIG/C to the Meeting, such representative to be aware of confidentiality issues (see 1.7 immediately below).

1.7. Exco and Council business is confidential overall, although common sense and knowledge would determine what is truly confidential as compared to unproblematic matters of activities, administration, etc. The truly confidential include matters relating to donors, especially potential and unconfirmed donors, matters relating to Secretariat staff, matters relating to government bodies, conservation & development proposals, contentious matters, and so on.

1.8. The definition of a Special Interest Group (SIG), as in the Constitution, is quite limited. SIGs work in very different ways in practice, mostly due to differences in size, activities, history and so on. This allows for needed flexibility in terms of types of interests and organizational preferences of NSS members.

The major aspects of SIGs:

A. They are approved by Exco. Exco will accept a group that puts itself forward convincingly as a Special Interest Group, elects a Chairperson to represent it at Council, and outlines activities, etc. in line with the Society's objectives. This approval could be withdrawn at any time by Exco.

B) There is a Chairperson, to be changed every three years. The Chairperson is appointed by majority vote during a meeting of SIG members. If during the term of office, there is a case of dispute which the Chair of the SIG cannot successfully resolve within NSS guidelines and policies, then Exco will step in and resolve the matter and appoint a suitable replacement Chairperson if needed. Some SIGs also have other named office holder, (e.g. Secretary, Vice Chairperson, Treasurer). Some SIGs operate with a clear, named Committee, but others do not.

C) There are activities for NSS members (frequent or occasional) that are openly advertised to all NSS members, such as walks, talks, learning workshops, surveys, censuses, etc. Some SIGs may also operate some closed activities for trained members of the group, but the understanding is that the pool of trained members should not be closed and that other suitable, interested NSS members should be able to join and learn the relevant skills and knowledge.

D. There is adherence to budgeting and financial procedures in relation to expenses of and income from their projects or activities.

E. There is no criterion for "membership" of an SIG. All NSS members can attend the advertised activities of the SIGs. NSS Members who regularly attend the activities of a specific SIG can, in one valid sense, be considered "members" of that group, and the Chairperson will keep a membership list. Many NSS members can be considered, on this basis, "members" of several or almost all groups. It is clearly stated in every issue in Nature News that all NSS members can attend the advertised activities of any group (and essentially "join" in that sense). In case of dispute, Exco will decide which NSS members can be considered SIG members.

F. What is important is that SIGs operate within the overall Society, they and their so-called "members" are first and foremost members of NSS and are bound by the NSS guidelines and policies. Non-member individuals who may engage in activities with them or volunteer to help in their activities and events should understand that they are volunteering with NSS.

G. SIGs can set up WhatsApp groups, Google groups and Telegram groups for members as required. In case of dispute, Exco will decide on the format and scope of such SIG social media tools.

1.9. Committees were distinguished from Special Interest Groups such that Committees have a task to do on behalf of the Society, whilst SIGs are focussed on a particular area of interest of members, e.g. a specific grouping of flora, fauna or habitat. Chairpersons of Committees are appointed by Exco (Constitution 28.11) and there is no time limit for holding the position.

## **Independence**

2. If and when NSS provides information, data, advice and/or support to assist any party in its efforts to conserve ecosystems and/or species or to limit its impact on them, NSS shall reserve the right to be critical of those efforts or disassociate itself from them especially where, in the opinion of NSS Exco:

- a) such efforts are not undertaken properly or seriously, and consequently either fail to deliver substantive benefits to conservation or fail to limit the impact of threatening processes on habitats, species and ecosystem services; or
- b) where the information, data or advice provided is ignored, improperly used or erroneously presented; or
- c) where NSS' role in such efforts is improperly highlighted in support of propositions, proposals or strategies that are detrimental to conservation.

## **3. Collaborations and Donations.**

NSS may reject specific collaboration opportunities or donations from specific parties if the NSS Exco feels that;

- a) The business and other activities of those parties have a negative impact on biodiversity, habitats and ecosystem services; or
- b) The business and other activities of those parties include the delivery of products and services which are detrimental to human health, or where those parties are in violation acceptable norms in relation to the use of labour; or
- c) Such collaborations or the acceptance of such donations may have a reputational impact on NSS; or
- d) Such collaborations or the acceptance of such donations may adversely affect its existing relationships, partnerships or cause it to be in breach of existing legal obligations; or
- e) Such collaborations or the acceptance of such donations may have an impact on the objectivity and independence of NSS or create the perception of such.

NSS may also reject donations from foreign parties where such donations are for the purposes of supporting advocacy work.

Donations:

- a) All decisions to accept donations from any party shall be approved by the Exco.

NSS may acknowledge all donations on its website, magazines and other collaterals and allow for logos of donor organizations to be used in relation to such acknowledgements, but shall not, in exchange for such donations, allow any advertisements to be placed on its collaterals.

#### 4. Advertisements

- a) Non-NSS activities or products shall not be advertised or publicised on the NSS website or in NSS publications unless such advertisements/publicity have been approved by the Exco.
- b) The Exco may only provide such approval where such advertisements/publications:
- i. 1.Support or supplement the work and/or objects of NSS; or
  - ii. 2.Relate to the activities/products of organizations that NSS is in partnership or collaboration with; or
  - iii. 3.Relate to nature trips organized by NSS members within or outside Singapore; or
  - iv. 4.Relate to products or services that are non-controversial and can be considered of use to members.

#### 5. Web-links

- a) Links to any other websites or similar shall not be placed on the NSS website or on group pages unless they have been approved by the Exco.
- b) The Exco shall approve such links only where they connect to sites which promote conservation, science, research and/or education. There should be no links to commercial or political sites.
- c) Given the possibility of conflicts of interest arising, the Exco shall exercise special care when approving any links to websites owned or operated by members.

#### 6. Conflicts of interest

Exco and Council members shall declare likely conflicts of interest at 1st meeting of each new Exco & Council.

Exco and Council members shall not participate in decision making where potential conflicts of interest exist.

### **Liability**

#### 7. Entering into Agreements

In consideration of its status as an IPC and in view of its need to be an independent voice for conservation, NSS shall, in entering into agreements, be especially mindful of contractual provisions that;

- a) Require it to provide indemnities or take on excessive liability.
- b) Impose financial penalties and liquidated damages for non-compliance.
- c) Limits its ability to create or retain intellectual property.
- d) Require ownership of the data belonging to NSS, or collected by NSS and its volunteers to be relinquished or transferred.
- e) Limit its ability to make public statements.
- f) Unduly restrict its ability to enter into collaborations with other parties.

- g) Require it to undertake any activity that is inconsistent with its status as a charity and institution of public character.

Agreements entered into by NSS shall only be executed by authorized signatories appointed by the Exco. The authorized signatories shall be Exco Members and the Exco may impose limits and conditions on the signatory powers granted to individual signatories. These include but not limited to;

- a) Limits based on the value of the contract.
- b) Limits on the nature and type of contracts that individual signatories are permitted to sign.
- c) Limits on the duration of the signatory powers granted. Such powers shall, in any event, automatically expire upon the authorized signatory ceasing to be a member of Exco.

All contracts that intend to bind NSS shall be reviewed by Hon Secretary and signed by President.

## 8. Use of Premises

NSS shall not permit the use of its premises by other organizations, societies, groups or individuals to conduct meetings or activities, unless NSS is a party in such meetings or activities. This ruling is based on the fact that such use would create additional work for NSS staff and create issues from an office insurance perspective.

## 9. The Society will maintain the following insurance policies

- a) Standard Fire and Property Insurance for NSS Property in Geylang.
- b) Public Liability Insurance Cover to cover NSS and volunteer leaders & guides.
- c) Workmen's Compensation insurance to cover secretariat staff.

## **Intellectual Property and Branding**

### 10. Copyright

- a) All copyright in materials (1) developed by or on behalf of NSS, (2) where NSS has provided significant input or (3) where NSS has contributed significantly towards the financing including publications, reports, websites, web applications and smart phone applications - shall belong to NSS.

Contracts entered into with third parties with regards to the development and publication of such materials shall include provisions confirming the ownership of the copyright by NSS.

### 11. Data Ownership

It is recognized that NSS accumulates primary data on species, habitats, ecology and the state of nature during its surveys and other activities.

- a) NSS shall be entitled to assert ownership of such data when such surveys or activities are organized exclusively by NSS, its Committees or its SIGs.
- b) In relation to surveys or activities that are organized exclusively by NSS, survey/activity leaders shall, prior to such surveys or activities, advise and obtain confirmation from participants that data collected shall belong to NSS.

c) Where data is owned by NSS, such data shall not be disclosed to third parties, unless such third parties enter into a Non-Disclosure Agreement with NSS. Such a Non-Disclosure Agreement shall be executed on behalf of NSS by an Exco Member who is an authorized signatory.

d) Where NSS participates in surveys organized by other parties or, organizes (or participates in) surveys in tandem with other parties, NSS shall, prior to the commencement of such surveys, reach an understanding with these parties on the ownership of data collected.

## 12. NSS Logo

For the purposes of developing a common identity and greater solidarity within NSS, it is agreed that the NSS logo shall be the only logo used by all Committees Special Interest Groups or any other NSS groupings in the management and promotion of their activities, in relation to projects and on all publications, collaterals, blogs, e-groups and software applications. The NSS Logo comprises the mangrove tree design and the words "Nature Society (Singapore)".

NSS Tee-shirt. To support this, an NSS tee-shirt bearing the NSS logo (mangrove tree and society name), with some variations in style, was designed to give a common identity to members at activities, events, booths and so on.

Tee-shirts, caps and similar wearable or carryable items (e.g. tote bags, water bottles) with SIG/C names on them do not support the above purpose.

Publications, posters at booths, project or survey proposals/reports and other items of substance etc., however, may and should, where relevant, carry the name of the SIG/C involved together with the NSS logo.

NSS Tee-shirts intended for common identity purposes are not provided freely but are to be purchased at cost by all members (including Exco and Council Members) and volunteers, and supplied free only to Secretariat Staff.

Tee-shirts for specific events or projects may carry the name of the event or project, e.g. Bird Race, Wildlife Walk, together with the NSS Logo.

Other tee-shirts may carry a flora or fauna design and species name(s) together with the NSS logo.

## 13. Project Logo

When collaborating or partnering with reputable third parties on specific conservation initiatives, the Exco may, exceptionally, approve the use of a project logo that will be used by all parties in conjunction with their participation in those conservation initiatives. Such approval may be provided when;

- a) The project logo is used only for the duration of any such collaboration; and
- b) The NSS logo is always used in tandem with the project logo; and
- c) The Exco is confident that the NSS logo and brand will not be diluted as a consequence of the use of the project logo.

## **Communications**

### 14. Public Image

NSS needs to ensure that its public image:

- a) Accurately represents NSS, its activities and its concerns with flora, fauna and conservation, to members, general public and potential donors; and
- b) Does not get adversely affected by any erroneous or contentious public statements or any public statements relating to NSS' business which should be contained within NSS or within limited circles of NSS; and
- c) Is controlled in accordance with the COC Code of Governance for IPCs, since it utilises funds from the public. NSS is expected by COC to have a single spokesperson. According to NSS Constitution the spokesperson is the President, although this power can be delegated by him; and
- d) Is controlled so as to reduce the liability of NSS for what may be said in the name of the NSS and in/on what is NSS-owned/controlled media.

For the above reasons, all public statements should be approved by Exco and the President should be treated as the public spokesperson, although he may approve other Exco or Council members speaking on behalf of the Society in general or, more usually, on specified topics.

### 15. NSS Website

There is only one NSS website (owned by NSS) and information published on any other website (excluding the NSS Facebook page) shall not be taken to represent the views of NSS.

Each SIG and Committee shall have a web page that is incorporated into the website.

- a) Overall control. The website is moderated under the control of Exco. The control is through Super Administrators, namely Secretariat staff and Council Members designated by Exco.
- b) Moderators (administrators). There are moderators (administrators) assigned by SIG and Committee Chairpersons for SIG/Committee webpages and for NSS events list, each with a password. Secretariat staff issue passwords and keep a list of all moderators of SIG/Committee webpages and events list.
- c) All materials when posted up by SIG/Committee Moderators, for news items on the Group webpages and main page, or for inclusion in the NSS events list, go in draft to the Super Administrators for review, whether of tidying of details or content issues. Anything that may be contentious is referred to Honorary Secretary (at present — could be another Exco member in future) for decision or for discussion with other Exco members before decision.

### 16. Internal Communications

A blog, e-group or forum shall only be deemed to belong to NSS (or be affiliated to it) where:

- a) It is created or developed with the approval of the Exco; and
- b) At least one Exco member has administrative password access to it, to enable Exco to remove posts/comments which it determines are offensive, derogatory or defamatory in nature, or which do not relate directly to nature conservation, or to remove/exclude participants who make such posts/comments; and
- c) With the exception of the seven listed immediately below, it has been incorporated into the NSS website;

NSS Facebook Page— This, and related Facebook Group Page, has 6 or 7 administrators/moderators who shall be Exco or Council Members, Secretariat Staff, or other members in good standing designated by the Exco. Any change of moderators will always ensure that there is sufficient representation of both Exco and Secretariat Staff.

Bird Group Facebook Page — At least one Exco member will serve as an administrator/moderator.

NSS Council e-loop - owned and moderated by the President, operates as a confidential forum with limited number of members, who are Exco Members, Council Members, former Council Members, Trustees and Secretariat Staff. Any change of President will lead to a change of owner and moderator to the incoming President.

NSS Nature News e-loop - owned and moderated by Exco or Council Members, Secretariat Staff, or other members in good standing designated by the Exco who are the only ones who can send "Read only" messages to members who have signed up for it. It is used to disseminate information on activities and events of Society, events and

activities of other groups which are likely to be of interest to members and newsletters of other groups, e.g. BirdLife International, that could be of interest. Any change of Secretariat staff or officers will lead to transfer of owner and/or moderators.

NSS Plants Appreciation e-loop — owned and moderated by an ex-Exco member and Publications Committee Member, affiliated to Plant Group.

NSS Fun with Nature blog — owned and moderated by Chair of Education Committee.

NSS Bird Group blog — owned and moderated by a Bird Group member appointed by Exco.

### 17. Print media: Nature Watch & Nature News (now electronic)

#### A. Nature Watch

Nature Watch is professionally edited by an editor and an assistant editor, both being members in good standing.

Disclaimer: There is a disclaimer permanently on the first page of Nature Watch saying that views are those of writers and not of Society.

#### B. Nature News

Nature News is edited and published by the NSS Outreach Officer in consultation with members of Exco and SIGs/Committees.

### 18. Communication with the Press

Communication with the Press:

a) Requests for interviews should be communicated to Exco in advance wherever possible for approval. It is however recognized that members of the press may contact NSS in relation to topical issues and it may be necessary for the Designated Individuals to provide comments and feedback to the press at short notice. In such circumstances, Designated Individuals shall notify the Exco or President immediately afterwards of the interview, its contents and the position(s) taken.

b) All e-mail correspondence with the press by designated Exco and Council Members should be copied to President / Exco.

c) NSS shall be entitled to treat all comments by other NSS members as personal comments and shall be entitled to so advise the press, should it feel the need to do so.

d) Where an individual refers to his/her present/past involvement with NSS and employs such reference as a validation for any opinion, analysis or expertise, NSS reserves the right to publically clarify both the role played by that individual within NSS and the validity of the assertions made,



where in the opinion of the NSS Exco the assertions made are erroneous, misplaced or made in bad faith, and are damaging to the reputation of NSS. Where the provision of such clarification is deemed necessary, the response provided shall be measured, proportionate and based on legal advice taken to avoid liability.

e) In communicating with the press, Designated Individuals should provide comments or suggestions, or highlight the need for improvements in a clear, objective and constructive manner without using language which is inflammatory or which is intended to provoke or humiliate.

All official press releases prepared on behalf of NSS should be approved by the Exco prior to release.

#### 19. Meetings with Statutory Bodies:

a) The President is the official spokesperson for the Society. Designated Individuals who are familiar with NSS' position on the relevant issues may however be appointed by the Exco for the purposes of i) attending meetings with or communicating with statutory bodies and corporates on matters relating to the conservations of species and habitats, or ii) participating in conservation forums.

b) Where the Designated Individuals attend meeting with statutory bodies or participate in conservation forums, they shall notify the Exco or President of these engagements beforehand and shall notify and update the Exco or President immediately afterwards of the proceedings and the specific position(s) taken by all parties.

c) In communicating with statutory bodies on matters relating to the conservations of species and habitats, or when participating in conservation forums, Designated Individuals should provide comments, feedback or suggestions, or highlight the need for improvements in a clear, objective and constructive manner without using language (or tone) which is inflammatory or which is intended to provoke or humiliate.

#### 20. NSS Position Papers:

a) All NSS position papers and documents that are released on the NSS website and all feedback documents that are submitted to statutory bodies shall be first vetted and approved by the Exco prior to their release or submission.

b) Position papers on issues under discussion in Singapore should be written and posted on the website so that journalists can read them.

#### 21. NSS Letters to the Press:

When letters to the print press are written by an Exco or Council member and where that letter is written in his/her capacity as an Exco/Council member, the letter should be approved by the Exco or, where this is not practically possible, by the President prior to it being released to the press.

#### 22. Press Articles by NSS Exco and Council Members:

Where an NSS Exco or Council member contributes an article for publication in a newspaper, magazine or an academic journal, and where the writer either identifies himself/herself or as a current position- holder in NSS, or permits himself/ herself to be so identified, that writer shall notify the NSS Exco of general content and tone of the article and seek the approval of the NSS Exco for publication. Alternatively, the writer should, in such circumstances, include suitable wording in the article, to make clear that the views expressed are his or her own.

### 23. Formal Trip Reports:

Members Resolution 2: That after an official representative of the Society or Special Interest Group (or his/her nominee) attends an official meeting, event, conference or course/workshop/seminar on behalf of NSS or any of its SIGs, he or she be required within 1 month of return to submit a formal report of proceedings to the NSS Council and an article for inclusion in Nature News, and/or give a talk/presentation for members.