

Russell W. Peterson (1916–2011)



Jimmy Carter, in a speech in 1993, said, “Every time something wonderful has happened when I was President and since then in the field of environmental quality in this country or on a global basis, Russ Peterson has been intimately involved in it”.

In memoriam

Russell Peterson was a close friend of mine and a Member of the Advisory Board of this journal. With a Ph.D. in chemistry, he worked as a research scientist and went on to serve as Governor of Delaware where he pushed through the state’s Coastal Zone Act in 1971, thus protecting Delaware’s 28-mile coastline from industrial development. Thereafter, Russell was appointed by the president to serve as chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality where he helped shape the process of environmental impact statements under the National Environmental Protection Act. Among his many roles in conserving the environment, he led a task force whose work contributed to the global phase-out of CFCs and served as president of the National Audubon Society from 1979 to 1985.

Wolfgang E. Burhenne, Editor-in-Chief

REFERENCES TO OTHER TOPICS

United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) on the Anniversary of Chernobyl Accident

With two specially produced reports and a media event, UNSCEAR presented some of the key lessons and experiences of the Chernobyl nuclear accident, at a very appropriate time in light of recent events (see below). UNSCEAR’s primary output, a report to the Fourth Committee on the Effects of atomic radiation, is summarised in detail in A/RES/65/96, 20 January 2011. (TRY)

UNEP Takes on the Sustainable UN

In conjunction with UN-HABITAT, UNEP has recently opened its newest office facility in the Gigiri compound in Nairobi, Kenya, with a structure that sets high standards for solar energy generation, rainwater collection and use, and general “green” construction and design. The expansion of office space in Nairobi may put to rest speculation that some UNEP and habitat departments and staff are set to be relocated. See http://www.diplomateastafrica.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=318:keep-unesp-un-habitat-in-nairobi. (TRY)

Biosafety:

– Second Signing Ceremony for Liability Protocol

The CBD Secretariat has scheduled a second signing ceremony for the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Protocol on Liability and Redress, adopted last October at COP-MOP-5 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (EPL 40/6, page 293). As of mid-April, Colombia, Denmark, Netherland and Sweden have signed the Supplementary Protocol, whose entry into force will not turn on signatures, but will occur 90 days after the formal ratification or acceptance of the protocol by 50 countries. (TRY)

– European Commission Reports on GMO Decision Making

Following the request of the European Commission’s Environmental Council regarding the “sensitive topic” of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), an EC report has been released which notes the existence of critical information shortages in the areas of socio-economic impacts of GMO cultivation and social impacts and effects of GMOs along the food chain, before weakly concluding that “when the weed or pest pressure is high, farmers cultivating HT and Bt GM crops [two common types of GMOs] could benefit from higher yields”. The report included many comments on “social consequences and economic impacts of GMO cultivation on the other parts of the food chain”, but did not come to any conclusion regarding this issue. Regarding this report, an EC press release cites Health and Consumer Policy Commissioner, John Dalli’s description of the report as a first step: “It is now up to the Member States, the Commission, the European Parliament and all interested parties, to fully grasp the report’s findings and embark on an objective discussion on the potential role of socio-economic factors in the management of GMO cultivation in the European Union”. See http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/biotechnology/index_en.htm. (TRY)

– EU Parliament Allows GMO Bans for Environmental Purposes

The European Environment Committee of Parliament voted to allow EU countries to ban or restrict the use of GMOs on environmental grounds, giving them better legal protection in the event of challenges from trading partners opposed to a ban (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/en/headlines/content/20110408STO17335/html/EU-countries-should-be-able-to-ban-GMOs-on-environmental-grounds-MEPs>). Following this decision, EU Members may restrict or ban GMO cultivation on agro-environmental grounds, but not on health grounds. (TRY)

Next IEA Executive Director Selected

The Governing Board of the International Energy Agency (IEA) has selected Maria van der Hoeven (Netherlands) to serve as Executive Director, when current holder of that position, Nobuo Tanaka, steps down on 1 September 2011. More information on Mme der Hoeven is available online at http://www.iea.org/index_info.asp?id=1874. (TRY)

Arctic Region: Ozone Layer Loss

Data from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) shows that the Arctic region suffered an ozone column loss of about 40 percent from the beginning of the winter to late March owing to the continuing presence of ozone-depleting substances and extremely cold temperatures in the stratosphere. The highest loss previously recorded was about 30 percent over the winter (see Press Release: http://www.wmo.int/pages/mediacentre/press_releases/pr_912_en.html). (WEB/ATL)

SPREP: Pacific Climate Change

The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme convened the 3rd biannual Pacific Climate Change Roundtable Meeting (PCCR) from 14–17 March in Niue. All presentations, papers and the outcome document are available at: http://www.sprep.org/climate_change/PCCR/. (WEB/ATL)

Transforming the African Union

The 4th meeting of African legal experts convened from 14–22 March in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) to consider the necessary process for transforming the AU Commission into an AU Authority. The meeting was expected to finalise the legal instruments on the transformation for submission to the 17th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly in Malabo (Equatorial Guinea) in June (see Press release: http://au.int/en/dp/legal/sites/default/files/PR_NO_14_MARCH_2011_LEGAL_AU_MEMBER_STATES). (WEB/ATL)

European Union

– Enhancement of the “Zero Tolerance”

Campaign against Illegal Fishing

The EU reports that its new system for fisheries control “is now fully operational”, following the adoption of new implementing rules under that system. In addition to improving “traceability of violations”, harmonising sanctions, enabling the use of technological enforcement mechanisms, and generally simplifying EU fisheries controls, the new regulation also “details the mechanisms that may be used by the Commission to ensure compliance by the Member States”. The latter is critical, given the EU system under which fisheries controls are agreed on at EU level, but implemented and carried out by the national authorities and inspectors of EU Member States. For more information, review the EU fisheries control regulation, at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:343:0001:0050:EN:PDF>. (TRY)

– Fisheries Committee Backs Binding Rules for Port States

In a recent decision, the EU Fisheries Committee called on the Union to support FAO’s Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (see *EPL* 40/6, page 262). See <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/en/pressroom/content/20110411IPR17415/html/Illegal-fishing-Fisheries-Committee-backs-binding-rules-for-port-states>. Such support could be life-giving to the PSM Agreement, which currently has only three ratifications, but will enter into force following its 25th. (TRY)

Japan:

– Efficient Tsunami Response from International Agencies

Following the Japanese tsunami, the humanitarian response appeared to be unusually effective in comparison with other recent disasters in developed countries. The World Food Programme, for example, noted that, through an outpouring of support it had been able to “fully fund our operation there within 36 hours, providing specialised logistics support in the delivery of emergency supplies to families who need them the most”. (TRY)

– Environmental Responses to Fukushima Nuclear Accident

Following the serious need to address direct injuries and risks to humans, and to ensure that the mechanical/scientific condition of the various reactors is stable, it will soon be time to focus on the next important effort in response to last March’s nuclear and seismic events in and around the east coast of Honshu, Japan. While the world is still getting a grip on the facts surrounding the nuclear accident and the various responses to it, it is also already gathering data on critical environmental factors, including radiation levels in the oceans, and the impact on plants. Already, for example, the Japan Agency for Marine-



Courtesy: IAEA

Earth Science and Technology, sampling 30 kilometres from the coastline, has found measurable concentrations of iodine-131 and cesium-137. The iodine concentrations were at or above Japanese regulatory limits, while the cesium levels (thought to pose greater long-term risks) were well below those limits. FAO has reported the same contaminants in leafy vegetables and milk in the region.

Typically, ecosystem and other environmental impacts are considered only after the human and food-related concerns have been fully addressed. It is hoped that the high levels of attention, action and information sharing currently available (see <http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/2011/fukushimafull.html>) will not entirely disappear when the emergency concerns are focused in the environmental direction. (TRY)

DRC: No Oil Drilling in Virunga National Park

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has announced that the Government will abandon all plans for oil exploitation within Virunga National Park. The decision follows earlier commitments made in the Kinshasa Declaration (14 January). See: <http://whc.unesco.org/uploads/news/documents/news-702-1.pdf>. (WEB/ATL)

Ukraine: Greater Protection for Protected Areas

Ukraine Environmental Policy and Law Weekly reports that the Ukrainian Parliament recently adopted new legislation imposing a five-year moratorium on changing the target purpose of any “green zone lands” – lands with green plantings and lands in cities and other inhabited areas, that are objects of physical culture and sports. The law also forbids destruction or removal of “objects of stationary recreation” located on these lands. Ukraine Law No 3159-VI from 17 March 2011 (<http://zakon1.rada.gov.ua/cgi-bin/laws/main.cgi?nreg=3159-17>). (TRY)

Australia: Some Species are Not Worth Saving

According to *Scientific American*, a group of scientific researchers at University of Adelaide and James Cook University have developed an algorithm that concludes that “some endangered species on the brink of extinction might not be worth saving” (<http://www.scientificamerican.com/blog/post.cfm?id=australian-mathematicians-say-some-2011-04-14>). (TRY)

