



Minutes of the Technical Working Group UXO/Mine Clearance

Date: Thursday 27th November 2008

Start: 13.30

End: 16.45

Place: NRA Conference Room

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Approved:

Attendance:

Mr. Somnuk Vorasarn, Deputy Director NRA
Mr. Phommachanh Khammanichanh, SEOD NRA **Chairman**
Mr. Phil Bean, OPS/QA TA NRA. **Secretary**
Ms. Ruth Bottomley, TA MRE NRA
Ms. Douangtri Souphanouvong, OPS Officer MAG
Mr. Mick Hayes, MD PCL
Mr. Aaron Hayes, OPS PCL
Ms. Kim Warren, UXO Coordinator, HIB
Mr. Keng Keo, TSCOM, HIB
Mr. Nigel Orr, TA FSD
Mr. Eric BOULIN, OPS Off. FSD
Mr. Aksel Steen-Nilsen, TA NPA
Mr. Steve Pritchard, PM/TA NPA/UXO LAO
Mr. Alan Mckeown, OPS Manager, BECTEC
Mr. Troy Pudney, UXO Coordinator LXML
Mr. Somphong Chanthavong, TA FSD
Mr. Bountao Chanthavongsa, VA Technician NRA
Mr. Bouaphet Phommavong, Clearance Technician NRA
Mr. Thongdy Phommavongsa, MRE Officer, NRA
Mr. Phouviengsavanh Keosouphan, QA Officer.
Ms. Daovieng Darasavath, OPS Assistant NRA

1: Introduction

Mr Sumnuk introduced and opened the meeting in the absence of Mr Thongphone who was attending a UNESCO meeting in Xieng Khounang. He apologized that he would not be able to stay for the entire meeting but wanted to comment on two of the agenda topics before he had to leave: Explosive supply he mentioned that the NRA was working with the Ministry concerned to produce procedures to enable smooth supply of explosive, the TWG should not worry about this it was being taken care of with the Ministry concerned. Mr Somnuk informed the working group that the NRA had recently conducted a series of meetings with all Provincial authorities and that UXO sector focal points would be established in all provinces probably being based within the Provincial Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare office.

He raised one question about whether clearance organizations should pay villagers to cut vegetation in advance of clearance, some did and some did not and a policy position from the NRA would be useful, he asked the TWG to consider this point. Mr Somnuk referred questions from this introduction to the respective agenda items for more 'in depth' discussions and handed over the chairmanship of the TWG to Mr Phommachanh before departing.

Mr Phommachanh introduced the members of the meeting to each other and proceeded with the agenda.

Item 2: Minutes of the last meeting and actions arising.

Mr Phommachanh reviewed the minutes of the last meeting, summarizing the content and taking forward outstanding action points in to the agenda for today's meeting.

Mr Steven Pritchard from NPA asked if there would be a meeting to discuss the sector evaluation as agreed at the Sector Working Group of 5 November. Mr Phil replied on behalf of the NRA, he explained that the time constraints driven by the approaching Oslo meeting had led to a number of separate initiatives and various plans for the sector to be designed without full consultation, this was recognized as not being ideal and the intention of the NRA was to take a pause in January and consolidate all the separate activities and initiatives so that the wider stakeholder groups could be involved. With regard to the next steps from the sector evaluation, we would have an opportunity to discuss this, as agreed by Dr Maligna at the SWG meeting of 5 November, prior to discussing the scope and the process for the revision of the sector strategic plan.

Item 3: Explosive Supply

The supply of serviceable explosives has been identified as a problem since June 2007. The NRA had undertaken to act as the focal point for explosive orders and to deal as a one stop shop with the MOD in regard to order and delivery of explosives. The process does not work well, the procedures are not clear, and delays in information and delivery are the normal. This has been a problem for all organizations, UXO LAO, NGOs and commercial companies. Generally the service provided by the NRA and the Army was not good enough and the NRA acknowledged its responsibilities to make the process clear and responsive.

Explosive orders were outstanding for FSD and HIB (C4 and detonators) and Bactec (C4 and 12.7mm carts), information on the progress on these orders was requested.

Major Ankham, the military liaison officer working at the NRA, was not available for comment.

Mr Phil, speaking on behalf of the NRA acknowledged some embarrassment due to the failure of the NRA to resolve these issues, he asked that organizations write to the Director of the NRA if they were experiencing problems of supply, and said that it would okay to express disappointment and to ask for clarification of when they would get the explosives.

In addition the intention was that the minutes of the TWG meetings would be prepared in both Lao and English language so that they could be circulated to the NRA Board members for their information and where appropriate assistance.

Action: NRA to work with the MOD and produce clear procedure for the timely supply of good quality demolition explosives.

Item 4: Training and Competency Standards

Mr Phouviengsavanh and Mr Nigel briefed the working group on the progress of the project (FSD project funded by AusAID) to specify core competences required for Level 1, 2, 3, 4 EOD operators, Field medics, Surveyors, and Mine Clearance operators at levels 1, 2, 3, 4.

They explained the project process of drafting the core competency and supporting training documents, and then translation and circulation of documents for comment. This would be similar to the project to draft the UXO National Standards. Nigel would send out information, Mr Phouviengsavanh would provide coordination as the focal point within the NRA.

The TWG were asked to consider if it was necessary to include Mine Clearance Level 3 and 4, in the project. This would be considered, although the initial reaction from the group was that these levels were not necessary within the sector today.

Nigel told the TWG that he was having some problems getting reference material for all of the positions and asked for assistance particularly in regard to the medical competencies, Aaron Hayes of PCL would help review these particular standards.

Speaking on behalf of Milsearch (who were unable to attend the meeting today), Mr Phil registered that companies may not need to train their staff to the full competency levels stipulated by the NRA if their requirements are lower and their supervision is adequate, this would be the case for Level 1 EOD. This could be explained on an individual organization basis and Milsearch asked for some flexibility to be applied. Mr Phil, continued to speak on behalf of Ron Hawkins and informed the meeting that Ron had volunteered to dedicate time to the review of the competency standards and join in with any sub committees that were formed for this purpose. The TWG thanked Ron for his comments and commitment.

Nigel would continue to circulate documents for comment and aimed to produce the first full drafts by the end of December, this would be followed by a period of translation and review in the New Year, followed by amendments where necessary and then final production. The project was funded and timetabled to complete by the end of September 2009, but an earlier completion date would be beneficial for the sector.

The TWG were asked to participate actively in the review process to support this project, if necessary a small team working on behalf of the TWG would be formed.

Actions: TWG members to review the draft documents produced by the Core Competency Project team.

Item 5: Work plans and standard reports

Mr Phommachan explained to the TWG that the NRA required all organizations to submit their work plans to NRA for 2009, with details of what activities they were planning to carry out, where they would be working and when they would be working. The National Standards required that these be confirmed one month before the start of each quarter.

It was recognized that some organizations, particularly the commercial operators and NGOs working with other development partners could not always forecast their work that far ahead. It was agreed that work plans should be submitted when they became clear and confirmed, and that the reasons for the plans coming to the NRA was really for two main purposes, the first so that coverage of operations across impacted areas was recognized which would in turn enable gaps of coverage to be highlighted and the second reason was to enable progress monitoring to be planned along with QA/QC activities.

A proforma is attached showing the level of work planning detail required, this 'work planning' information will be entered into IMSMA to allow geographic display.

Mr Phommachanh distributed two 'standard' reports a 'Completion Survey Report' and a 'Roving Task' report, (copies attached), clearance operators will be required to submit these from 1st January 2009. They should be sent to the NRA and initially all data entry will be carried out by the NRA until such time that the IMSMA system can be established for each organization to use. A separate instruction relating to the 'standard' forms will be sent out by the NRA.

Item 6: Application of the Risk Model

The TWG discussed the use of the GICHD Risk Model, UXO LAO were training their staff to use this in parallel with their survey processes during February / March 2009. The intention from the NRA is to trial the model during 2009 and through this TWG to assess the application and advantage that it can bring to the sector. This topic would be carried forward to follow in TWG meetings.

Item 7: Trial and test criteria for deep search

A question had been raised about the trial and test of deep search locators, for shallow search is was easy to use a half BLU 26 at 25cms, but how should deep search detection ability be confirmed? Part of the answer was in trial and test of different locators in different soil conditions and consideration of establishing a national test site(s) was being considered. In the past small test sites had been established with UXO LAO in Xieng Khoung and at their training center at Ban Ylei. The current situation with these was not known.

LXML had in the meantime established two test sites in their area of operations in Savannakhet, and Troy Pudney provided a presentation on these. The sites were available for other organizations to use, with requests to be submitted through the NRA. A copy of the presentation is attached. The results of trials will be shared with the TWG. These were accurately established facilities and provided a useful resource for the sector. LXML and Oz Minerals were thanked for their presentation and for offering to share the facilities. Costs for use of these facilities would accessed on a case by case basis, but would be minimal relating to running costs if they were appropriate to a specific trial (e.g. accommodation or use of camp facilities).

Item 8: News Items

Mr Phommachanh briefed the TWG on some emerging news:

Projects:

- NPA with funding from Norway were in the process of designing a project for a new independent operations in Provinces where no UXO resources were currently available, they had recently conducted an assessment mission to Kasi District? Vientiane Province.
- HIB had received funding from the EU for an extension of their programme in Savannakhet.
- SODI were in the process of designing a project for Borikhamxay, Khamkeuth, District.

Future Technical Training Needs, reference was made to the NRA request for organizations to forecasts their future technical training needs. Replies had been received from FSD, NPA, MAG other operators particularly UXO LAO were asked to send in their returns. HIB asked if they could be sent the details again, and it was agreed by the NRA that they would do this.

Action: NRA to re-circulate the request for future training forecasts

Commercial slow down

The TWG discussed the economic slow down and what results were becoming visible with the sector. The commercial operators reported that new exploration with the mining companies had slowed down with new projects being put on hold.

The discussion moved on to the role of the Army within Lao PDR and the fact that they were being awarded commercial UXO clearance contracts, one example of the army working in support of the Tun Hin born (?) dam extension project was given, this involved some 1000 hectares of clearance and resettlement of some 4500 people. The question of the standards and accreditation of the army was raised. Clearly with the establishment of the NRA and the endorsement of National Standards the Army, for commercial projects, was required to conform to the same process as all other organizations. The NRA Director was requested to raise this issue with the NRA Board and report back to the TWG with the findings.

Action: NRA Director to confirm what commercial clearance the Army was involved with and the status of their authority to operate.

From the discussions a question was raised about how does the NRA interact with planning ministries where commercial operations are conducted without clearance, i.e. where companies decide that compensation for injury is a more viable commercial approach than paying for UXO clearance.

Action: Referred to the NRA Director for response.

Finally under this topic a question was raised about who cleared the UXO recovered and reported by the US MIA teams, it was confirmed that none of the organizations at the TWG were involved with this. It was understood that the reports were sent to MoFA or MOD to enable a roving task to be carried out.

Action: Referred to the NRA Director to discuss with MoFA / MOD.

Item 9: AOB

Nigel from FSD raised a problem about the security of radio VHF repeater sites and equipment, some repeater stations belonging to FSD, HIB and UXO LAO had been vandalized or stolen, He asked the NRA to try and support the security of these sites and work to finding solutions with the Provincial and District authorities. This was a matter of safety which impacted on the ability of UXO organizations to conduct their work.

Action: NRA would research what support they can provide to resolve this issue.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 16.450

Date of next meeting

With the end of year activities, there will not be a TWG at the end of December. The next meeting of the TWG will be Thursday 29th January 2009.

Minutes prepared by: NRA Operations Unit

Signature Mr Phil Bean
Date 5 /12/2008

Minutes Certified by:
Deputy Director, Chief of Operations:

Signature Mr Thongphne Keosayadet
Date 5/12/2008

Enclosures:

1. Workplanning form
2. Completion Survey Report
3. Roving Task Report
4. OZ Mineral Presentation.

Distribution:
Standard TWG Distribution list..
NRA Board. Lao language version.
NRA Staff.
NRA website.

