2. A second question was how to deal with uncertainty. A cycle management (LCM) in the scope of the initiative.

3. A third question was how to deal with value choices. In the ISO process, this point had given rise to intensive debate, particularly for public applications, i.e. the so-called comparative assertions. For the initiative, the starting point was formulated that it can indeed deal with value choices, like those underlying the establishment of a default list of impact categories, and the choice of periods of time or the establishment of an equivalency principle for aggregation in LCIA. This will be done under two conditions. (1) The first condition is that the distinction between scientific and value based information shall be fully transparent; and (2) the second that the final responsibility for possible choices will lie in the hands of the highest authority of the initiative, the International Life Cycle Panel (ILCP). It is further important to note that the establishment of best practice for the weighting step in LCIA has been excluded from the initiative. However, the following was added: "... the relationship between characterisation, normalisation and weighting methods will be analysed, because of the inherent interactions between these elements".

4. A fourth question regarding the LCI and LCIA programs dealt with the application dependency of the methods and data. Does best practice in the field of LCA exist, or does everything depend on the case at hand or on the place in the world? Like with the above questions, differing viewpoints were presented. The idea was developed that best methods or data may differ, not so much between different applications, but between different types of applications. For instance, there should best practice for product design, in contrast to strategic decision making; or best data in North America, in Japan, or in Europe; or preferred use of marginal methods for some types of applications (for instance short term optimisation), and average methods for other types of applications (for instance long term comparisons). For this approach the term 'generic application dependency' was coined.

The inclusion of aims related to LCM led to a further development of starting points for the initiative. A first important point was that also qualitative methods and life-cycle thinking came under the scope of the initiative, not only quantitative LCA. And, following this line, also other analytical tools were included in so far as these specifically contribute to the underpinning of life cycle management. Perhaps most fundamental was the question whether the initiative should be more modest and just aim at stimula-
tion of the exchange of information, and forget about best practice. This suggestion was not without ground. The aims of the initiative, the establishment of best practice, were seen as too top-down oriented. Instead, a bottom-up discussion with stakeholders and particularly with industry branches was recommended, probably leading to case dependent results and to education activities. Here a balance was found. Indeed, discussion with stakeholders was put in the front, starting with an identification of user needs. But still the aims relating to the enhancement of sound databases and methods, and general guidance on the use of data and methods remained a core part of the initiative.

In order to avoid the idea that just one method is to be identified as best practice for all types of applications, the term 'best practice' was replaced by 'recommended practice'.

2 Aims and Programs of the Initiative

At the launch of the initiative in Prague, 28 April 2002, the aims of the initiative are formulated as follows:

General aim 1: Exchange of information on the conditions for successful application of LCA and life cycle thinking

General aim 2: Exchange of information about the interface between LCA and other tools

General aim 3: Implementation of education activities related to the application of LCA and life cycle thinking

General aim 4: Development and enhancement of the availability of sound LCA data and methods

General aim 5: Provision of guidance on the use of LCA data and methods.

In order to reach these aims, three programs will constitute the initiative:

Program 1: The application of and education on LCA and life-cycle thinking (LCM program)

Program 2: Development and enhancement of sound LCI data and methods (LCI program)

Program 3: Development and enhancement of sound LCIA data and methods (LCIA program).

Each of these three programs will start with a definition study, to be completed in 2002.

By defining the aims and programs, the niche of the initiative in relation to other international organisations can also be indicated more precisely. SETAC primarily focuses on the development of the science underlying LCA; the International Society of Industrial Ecology (ISIE) focuses on the scientific developments underlying the toolbox for life cycle management; ISO focuses on the standardisation of LCA terminology, of technical frameworks, of general methodological requirements and of procedural guidelines; and the UNEP/SETAC Life Cycle Initiative focuses on the application of and education on LCA and life-cycle thinking and on the development of and guidance on sound and practical LCA data and methods.

In the framework of the aims of the initiative as a whole, aims have also been established for the three programs. These are given in the sections below.

3 Specific Aims of the LCI Program

The LCI program builds on the report of the SETAC-Europe Working Group on Data Availability and Data Quality (De Beaufort et al., in press). The general aims of the LCI program are the following:

LCI aim 1: A peer reviewed and regularly updated database or information system for the Life Cycle Inventory for a wide range of unit processes or subsystems ('building blocks') like electricity, transportation, or commonly use materials

LCI aim 2: A set of rules for LCI modelling, including rules for the setting of system boundaries and for allocation.

More specific aims regard the LCI databases:

LCI aim 3: A survey and evaluation of current and coming activities to build LCI databases

LCI aim 4: Consideration of an exchange format between LCI databases

LCI aim 5: Definition and authorisation of requirements for a UNEP/SETAC LCI database or information system, including consensus-based allocation rules

LCI aim 6: On the basis of these requirements, the development and maintenance of a UNEP/SETAC LCI database or information system

In the above aims consistently the phrase 'LCI database or information system' is used. Originally, just the term 'LCI database' had been used. There is an important difference here. The term 'LCI database' implies that all data will be gathered at one location; the aim would be a real global UNEP/SETAC LCI database. This aim appeared to be unpractical and undesirable. Unpractical, because data owners may not be willing to hand over their data, and also because the updating of such a database would become an increasingly difficult task. Undesirable, because such a database would induce competition with existing activities in the field of LCI databases, such as in Sweden, Switzerland and Japan. The term 'information system' is more open, concerning the location where the data are stored and updated. Such an information system can include, or can even be fully composed of decentralised databases. Still it concerns a coherent activity. Global criteria can be defined to evaluate the quality of the data, a format can be established for the exchange of data so that the data from the different databases are compatible with each other, and, last but not least, default methods can be developed for aggregating data of different unit processes into building blocks or subsystems. Although the focus is on decentralised databases with central co-ordination, it has not been excluded that for a number of important background processes with global reach a database at world level will be developed under the umbrella of the initiative. This is an important open point to be further discussed.

This focus on Decentralised Databases also implies that the first starting point, presented in section 1, involving a development from a global level to subsequent more detailed lev-