

**IUCN – THE WORLD CONSERVATION UNION  
THE WORLD CONSERVATION CONGRESS  
17-25 November 2004, Bangkok, Thailand**

**External Review of IUCN Commissions  
Summary of Report**

**Action Requested:** The World Conservation Congress is requested to:

- a) TAKE NOTE of the summary report of the External Review of the IUCN Commissions carried out in accordance with Resolution 19.2 of the 19<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly, Buenos Aires, 1994 and Article 46(e) of the IUCN Statutes;
- b) TAKE ACCOUNT of the recommendations of the External Review of the IUCN Commissions in considering the proposed Mandates of the Commissions 2005–2008.

The Commissions have played a key role in IUCN throughout its history. Despite changes to their mandates at different times, the original six Commissions continue today:

Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM)  
Commission on Education and Communication (CEC)  
Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP)  
Commission on Environmental Law (CEL)  
Species Survival Commission (SSC)  
World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA)

This continuity in the long term hides considerable turmoil and discontinuity over shorter periods in their history. Thus as we look at the Commissions now, two of them are in the early stages of rebuilding their networks (CEM and CEESP); one has recently undergone a major renewal process (CEC); and three can be said to be at a mature stage (CEL, SSC and WCPA).

**Purpose of Review**

This Review responds to the IUCN Statutes (Article 46(e)) which require Council to review the work of the Commissions in order to propose any changes to their mandates, and to the renewed commitment of the Commissions themselves to become more accountable to and integrated with the work of the other two pillars of the Union.

The purpose of the Review is to look at the six Commissions within a single comparative framework in order to draw conclusions about the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the Commissions as a group, and their positioning in relation to the initiatives that are shaping the global environmental conservation agenda. Although they are each very different, the Commissions operate in the same changing internal and external environment and they share common problems, such as increased competition for the resources that the Commissions need – experts' volunteer time, financial support from donors and the attention of governments and civil society to what they produce and what they say.

This report presents the conclusions of the overall review process including the knowledge products and services, together with the findings of the organizational and performance aspects of the Review. A more detailed discussion of the review component relating to the knowledge products and services of the Commissions is available on the IUCN website ([www.iucn.org](http://www.iucn.org)).

The Review conducted interviews with 93 people inside and outside the Commissions for the organizational assessment and surveyed the opinions of 587 Commission members through a web survey. A further 331 people were interviewed (110) or surveyed (174) specifically on the use and assessment of the Commissions' knowledge products and services, and 47 people involved in producing the products and

services were interviewed. Thus a total of 250 interviews were conducted and 761 responses to two surveys were received as input to the Review findings.

The Review is an **organizational** assessment and is not an in-depth evaluation of any Commission. It takes as its starting point the view that organizational performance is dependent on the *capacity* of the organization (its leadership, management, human and financial resources and its structure), its *motivation and incentives* and its *external environment*, which can facilitate or inhibit performance.

### **Nature and functions of Commissions**

Part VIII of the IUCN Statutes lays out the nature, composition and function of the Commissions:

*73. The Commissions shall be networks of expert volunteers entrusted to develop and advance the institutional knowledge and experience and objectives of IUCN.*

*75. The functions of the Commission shall be to fulfill their missions as defined in their mandates, including:*

- (a) to analyse issues and prepare assessments, reports, action plans, criteria and methodology and undertake research and other scientific and technical work;*
- (b) to undertake tasks assigned to them within the integrated programme of IUCN;*
- (c) to provide advice on any matter within their fields of competence;*
- (d) to broaden knowledge and competence on matters relating to their mandates;*
- (e) to work with members and the Secretariat to develop activities within the various Regions, and to support members and components of IUCN with necessary expertise; and*
- (f) to undertake such other responsibilities as may be assigned to them by the World Congress and the Council.*

Commissions are not organizations in the normal sense. They are expert networks that fall into the category of *formal knowledge networks*. As such they are volunteer networks that are task and purpose driven which add value rather than just exchange information and produce outputs, and are built on expertise as well as common interest. The lifeblood of knowledge networks is effective communications between members of the working components of the network in order for them to aggregate knowledge, produce outputs and engage with external bodies.

The criteria first enunciated for Commissions by the General Assembly of IUCN in 1990 parallel the operating principles for good expert knowledge networks:

1. It must be able to meet a clearly defined need;
2. There must be a widespread demand for the products of its work which must be central to the mission of the Union;
3. A Commission should not be a minor player in its field; it should be the main source of the knowledge it provides;
4. It should be possible to give its work a clear and limited focus so that Commission members clearly understand what is expected of them;
5. There is a strong and active network supported by a community of interest among the members;
6. A critical mass of members exists with some homogeneity of interest and commitment to common objectives;
7. It should balance diversity of expertise with a significant community of professional interest.

### **Mandates of Commissions**

The mandates for the Commissions derive from Regulation 69 of the IUCN Statutes which states that the mandate should include the Commission name, mission and terms of reference. Since 1994 this has been generally limited to the setting out of longer term goals for the Commissions rather than also defining objectives for the Intersessional Period. The mandates are more in the nature of organizational charters than

giving clear direction for the work of the Commissions. Without more focused and term-limited objectives and expected results, together with reporting back to Council by objectives and results, it does not seem possible for Council to fulfill its own statutory duty to review the work of the Commissions.

The Review recommends that the mandates for the Intersessional Period 2005–2008 be restructured to include programme objectives and expected results for the four year period, and that these should be linked to targets and indicators in the Commissions' Strategic Plans for the Intersessional Period.

The Review also recommends that Commission Chairs report to Council and Congress using a common written reporting framework that responds to the need to report on results obtained against the four-year objectives. Council may wish to consider if in addition, the annual reports from the Commissions going to Congress should be consolidated and accompanied by an overview document from Council on the work of all the Commissions for the Intersessional Period.

### **Commission Leadership**

The selection of a Commission Chair is a very important decision for IUCN as it is the Chair who nominates the rest of the leadership, selects the Specialist Group Chairs and gives overall direction to the Commission. The Chair alone is entitled to act in the name of the Commission. Thus the Chair has sweeping powers. This has caused problems when Chairs have followed a personal agenda, or have been unable to carry out their duties for whatever reason. Some Commissions have gone leaderless for long periods of time and almost all activities have ground to a halt. The performance review of Chairs by the President will go some way to respond to these situations but in addition there is a need to ensure that the Deputy Chair can be given the authority to take over, that the Steering Committee have a responsibility to continue to manage the Commission and that the Council ensures that there is a functional leadership in place.

The work of a Chair is very demanding and requires 30–50% of his/her time or more. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find outstanding and willing candidates who fulfill the requirements and have the time available from their other commitments, as well as the financial and administrative support of their institutions. This is particularly the case for candidates from the South. While all the Chairs are volunteers from the perspective of IUCN, in practice some are paid by other institutions for at least some of the time that they spend on Commission work, while others are not. The Review recommends that IUCN should help those Chairs who need such assistance to find financial support from a donor or member organization to cover their work for the Commission.

More generally we would recommend that the role of Chairs be re-examined in the light of new ideas about how knowledge networks work. In some respects, the top-down power structure of the Commissions seems the antithesis of networks that are innovative and maximizing the creativity of the members rather than just maximizing the work. When well performing models of innovative knowledge networks are going in the direction of more open systems, the Commissions have the look of a model from the past.

The Regional Vice-Chairs play a number of important roles. They act as a regional focal point for communications and liaison with regional members of the Commissions; they represent the work of the Commission in the region and mainstream relations with IUCN member organizations; and they identify opportunities and needs for volunteer involvement in conservation and sustainable development efforts on the ground. Depending on the Commission, they may also have a role to play in regional programming.

The Regional Vice-Chairs face two problems in carrying out their roles effectively. One is that most do not have efficient or updated databases on the Commission membership in their regions. The second is that they lack the resources to travel in their regions to organize members or to ensure necessary linkages with the IUCN Regional Programmes. Thus they lack the tools to make the links between member expertise, programme and projects, and the needs of IUCN member organizations and the Regional Offices.

### **Communications**

Networks run on good communications flowing from the leadership to the members, feedback from the members back up the system, and horizontal communications crisscrossing networks with ideas and

information. The Commissions are not as effective as they should be in managing communications, particularly at the level above the Specialist Groups. While it is true that much of the work of the Commissions is done within the Specialist Groups, there could be more value-added at the level of the Commission as a whole.

More communication of ideas and sharing of work should take place between Commissions since much of the repositioning of IUCN to carry out its one Programme implies collaborative work across the expertise and mandates of the Commissions. The trend to add to the membership of each Commission to respond to the need for interdisciplinary work rather than to establish joint Task Forces has led to a growth in the size of Commissions and the danger of duplication rather than cooperation.

Commission members are an important means by which the Commissions are linked to other knowledge networks since many are members of several international networks. Most still owe their main allegiance to their Commission.

### **Finances**

The Commissions receive core support from IUCN to pay for costs relating to the running and operations of the network through the Commission Operating Fund (COF). In addition they are actively raising funds for the programmes and projects of their Specialist Groups. Some Commissions and some Specialist Groups are better able to raise these programme funds than are others.

What should be a matter of concern for Council is that no one has a good overview of the donor funds being raised by the Specialist Groups in the name of IUCN or the Commissions – not the amounts, from what donors, or what institutions are administering them. This represents a reputational risk for IUCN that while it cannot be reduced to zero should be actively managed by a “due diligence” reporting process to systematically collate information from Specialist Groups. Knowing what funds are being implemented for the Mission of IUCN by its Specialist Groups would also provide a better measure of the total value of the Commissions to the Union.

### **Volunteer members**

The volunteer resources of the Commissions have long been recognised as one of their greatest strengths and quality of expertise has been a prime determinant of the decision to invite members to join a Commission. The increasing size of the Commissions and an apparent urge to increase membership raises questions about the selection process. For a knowledge network, size is less important than quality. It is important to maintain the Commissions as “major players in their field” and to ensure that the most outstanding experts do not migrate elsewhere.

Volunteer members value their Commission mainly for their access to new ideas and other experts, as well as enabling them to contribute to a larger enterprise that may also bring personal recognition. This is the value-proposition that the Commissions represent to their members and thus is what the Commissions must strive to provide. There are danger signals in the numbers of members who express frustration about lack of consultation from the leadership and a lack of opportunities to get more involved.

### **Programme Planning and Management**

The difficulties that the Review encountered in trying to assess how far the Commissions had carried out their workplans and delivered on their strategic plans reveal major inconsistencies between Commissions in their planning processes. At one level, this makes comparative analysis impossible. More seriously, it undermines the ability of Council and Congress to carry out their governance oversight of the Commissions. The Review recommends that there be put in place a more uniform and consistent approach to programme planning across all Commissions and that this process should be firmly anchored to the reporting process to Council.

Following the one Programme decision all Commissions are aligning their programmes and projects more firmly with the IUCN Programme and are trying to respond to the challenge of regionalization. However, in addition to the difficulties and resource constraints faced by the Regional Vice-Chairs, regional programming makes more sense for some Commissions than for others.

With the integration of the Commissions' work more formally into the IUCN Programme, it may now be an appropriate time for the Commissions to become part of the IUCN Monitoring and Evaluation system. This would provide for a systemic monitoring process and regular cycle of evaluations of both activities and outputs as well as the technical support of the Monitoring and Evaluation unit to help the Commissions learn from experience and identify successes.

The Commissions generally have not been very responsive to the IUCN Gender Policy although the implementation of gender perspectives is important to the work that the Commissions do, especially as they mainstream sustainable development and poverty reduction in their programmes. It is recommended that they take a more pro-active stance on developing tools and guidelines as well as developing their capacity to implement the IUCN Gender Policy.

### **Knowledge products and services**

The Commissions have made major contributions to the worldwide credibility and visibility of IUCN through the production and dissemination of their knowledge products and services, of which the best known is the SSC Red List. The Review found that the main drivers for producing these products and services are the motivations of the Commissions themselves. While this must be respected in a volunteer network, the views of the leadership should be complemented by more systematic processes for scanning the field – and the competition – and undertaking situation analyses, so that every product and service that IUCN invests in has a market that is well understood and accurately targeted. In other words, the Commissions are generally producing good products and services but they could be more strategic about when, where and how to produce and deliver them. More attention should also be paid to the value that can be added to new or existing products and services by adapting their format for strategic purposes and by collaborating with other IUCN components that can add to the knowledge value chain, assist in regionalization and improve the articulation of knowledge management work with members.

The need to be more strategic and purposeful in prioritizing which products and services to produce relates also to giving more consideration to the cost-effectiveness of individual products, especially for the general distribution of hard copies to all members and in bulk to conferences and to IUCN Regional Offices. Dissemination strategies should be developed in conjunction with IUCN thematic programmes and Regional Offices to make more use of electronic formats, target influential user groups more deliberately and minimize waste.

While some Commissions have in place very good quality control mechanisms, this is not universally the case. Peer review and editorial control procedures differ from Commission to Commission and from product to product. At the same time, all products and services produced by the Commissions are seen by users to be backed by the IUCN “warranty” for quality and relevance. To make this public perception closer to reality, IUCN should reinstate systematic quality control and editorial review processes; and should provide guidelines for the Commissions to follow.

Commission strategic plans and workplans should pay greater attention to the whole planning cycle for products and services. Commissions can map their intended knowledge products and services, assess their place on the knowledge value chain, assign priorities based on known criteria and integrate their outputs into their overall strategic frameworks. A systematic monitoring process to inform planning should include tracking the use, influence and impact of outputs to determine whether their use actually leads to the intended changes.

### **A new social contract**

The agreement of the Commission Chairs to work together with the Secretariat on one IUCN Programme should be based on a clear understanding of the real comparative advantage of each party and a greater mutual respect for one another. Assuming that the Commissions do add value to the delivery of the Programme, they should not find that they must “fit into” a Programme that is largely drawn up by the Secretariat and driven by donors for the Secretariat to implement. This will mean that the timing of planning processes will need to be developed collaboratively with the Commissions and that Advisory Committees to Programme also include or intersect with the relevant Commissions.

Going further, we see the need for a **new social contract** between IUCN and the Commissions that builds on the Son Loup Accords (1995, 1998) and the Bossey Agreement (2003). For increased accountability and greater commitment to work with the Secretariat to deliver the one Programme, the Commissions could expect more support from the Secretariat. In addition, one of the important roles for Commissions that is articulated both in the Statutes and in the operating principles of knowledge networks is that they should provide wise counsel and new ideas to IUCN within their areas of expertise. Thus the Commissions should not become simply another arm for delivering the Programme but should also both lead and challenge the directions in which it is heading.

### **Future action**

The Review does not recommend that any Commission be subject to an in-depth review before the World Conservation Congress in Bangkok.

Instead it proposes that over 2004–2005 the Commissions work with the Secretariat to undertake three cross-cutting reviews on:

- (1) What inputs IUCN needs from the social and economic sciences to mainstream poverty-environment;
- (2) How to develop more effective communications and knowledge management systems; and
- (3) How to position IUCN as the world leader in integrated assessments on ecosystems for human wellbeing.

These Reviews should build on the current initiatives underway in IUCN including the follow-up to the 3I-C Poverty and Livelihoods work, the Capacity Building Study, and the Knowledge Management Study.

### **Main Recommendations**

1. The statutory requirement for “terms of reference” in Commission mandates should be further elaborated to include:
  - i. Mission statement
  - ii. Goals for the Commission over the longer term
  - iii. Priority areas or themes
  - iv. Objectives for the Intersessional Period
  - v. Expected results for the Intersessional Period
  - vi. Structure and Organization
2. The Commission Chairs report to Council and Congress using a common written reporting framework and format that includes reporting results and achievements against objectives set in their mandates and as elaborated in their Intersessional Plans and Annual Workplans.
3. The inputs of present and past Chairs and the Director General be sought to propose to Council a policy to provide adequate support to Commission Chairs to release their time from their work and provide administrative support as needed in particular circumstances. This should be linked to clear accountability for such funds. The purpose of the policy would be to help enlarge the pool of potential outstanding candidates willing and able to stand for election and should help improve geographic balance.

A policy paper should provide the rationale and sufficient background to the policy (including the role, functions and time requirements of the Chair’s role) so that donors might be encouraged to “endow” or otherwise support a Chair for the Intersessional Period.

4. The statutory role of Deputy Chair of Commissions should be reviewed to clarify his/her role in the absence, incapacitation or non-performance of the Chair.

5. Commissions examine the effectiveness and limitations of their current systems and technology for communications within and between Commissions, including their websites, in order to develop a new strategy and identify with the Secretariat the technology needed to strengthen their role as knowledge providers for IUCN, to increase the participation of individual members, and to further innovation, interdisciplinary work and cross-Commission collaboration.
6. Following an initial scoping exercise, a mechanism should be put in place within the Secretariat to support fundraising efforts by Commissions, to share and collate information, and to provide an annual overview of donor funds for all Commission activities, including all Specialist Groups. This mechanism might include a staff person to serve all Commissions as a Commission Resources Focal Point.
7. Commissions should be asked to produce an Intersessional Plan that sets measurable objectives and/or targets for the four-year period, and the results expected for each year. The Intersessional Plan and subsequent reports to Council and Congress on how it was implemented should identify the contributions of the Commissions both to the IUCN Programme, the Regional Programmes and to other aspects of IUCN's Mission.
8. The Commissions establish a more formal process for monitoring and evaluation that is part of the overall framework of IUCN's Monitoring and Evaluation system. For its part, the Secretariat would be asked to provide support to the Commissions to develop appropriate methods and criteria for assessing the Commissions as knowledge networks.
9. Commissions include in their Intersessional Plans and Annual Workplans specific objectives and expected results for strengthening the gender dimension in their programmes during the Intersessional Period 2005–2008 in order to implement the IUCN Policy on Gender adopted by Council in April 1998.
10. IUCN should undertake three reviews in 2004–2005 to strengthen its capacity for integrated work on poverty and the environment:

**Review of the social and economic sciences input needed for the IUCN Programme 2005–2008.**  
To report to Congress in November 2004.

**Review of the role of communications in knowledge management.** To be undertaken early in 2005.

**Review of integrated approaches to ecosystems and human well-being.** To be undertaken by December 2005.

