

2016 IUCN Congress Participant Survey Report

A report based on the participant survey for the IUCN World Conservation Congress
in Hawai'i, USA, 2016

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For questions or additional information, please contact the IUCN Planning, Monitoring and
Evaluation Unit (evaluation@iucn.org)

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1 Overview

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2016 was hosted by Hawai'i, USA, from 1-10 September. Some 8600 registered participants attended the conservation Forum and/or Members' Assembly, and several thousand public attendees visited the Forum's exhibit hall where thematic Pavilions and exhibit booths offered a myriad of sessions, networking and social events. In total, the Forum offered 1251 events from panel discussions to workshops and knowledge cafés across four days.

The Members' Assembly, immediately following the Forum, was attended by a higher proportion of the Membership than the last Congress (Jeju, 2012). In 2016, a new process for submitting, debating and voting on Motions for a range of conservation topics resulted in the adoption of 99 Resolutions and Recommendations. All were debated in carefully moderated online discussion groups in the months preceding the event, and 85 were voted online. This freed up time for deeper debate on-site of the 14 most controversial and globally relevant policies, leading to revised texts that the Members adopted on-site. IUCN's Resolutions and Recommendations form the basis of the Union's conservation policy and guide all of its work.

To summarize and inspire action from the discussions of the Congress, the Members also adopted the Hawai'i Commitments, a five-page document compiled on-site to reflect the key challenges and opportunities discussed at the Congress. Whilst this notable achievement was a first for the IUCN Congress, the purpose and process must be more clearly communicated both in advance and going forward.

Incorporating lessons learned from the past Congresses generated significant changes and improvements to logistics, greening, communications and the structure of the Members' Assembly. IUCN also successfully increased youth engagement and interactivity of the workshops. The success of the event was also due, in no small part, to the venue and Hawaiian Aloha Spirit.

Criticisms and areas for improvement highlighted the absence of clear and tangible results, including a lack of clarity about the purpose of Hawai'i commitments. Unfortunately, this is not new, and still an essential strategic consideration for IUCN to address in the future. The post-event surveys and analysis of successes and challenges identified lessons for adjustment and several major areas that could improve the focus of the event, in particular the need to simplify and focus the Forum and the need to improve the design and running of contact groups (discussion groups for Motions) at the Members Assembly.

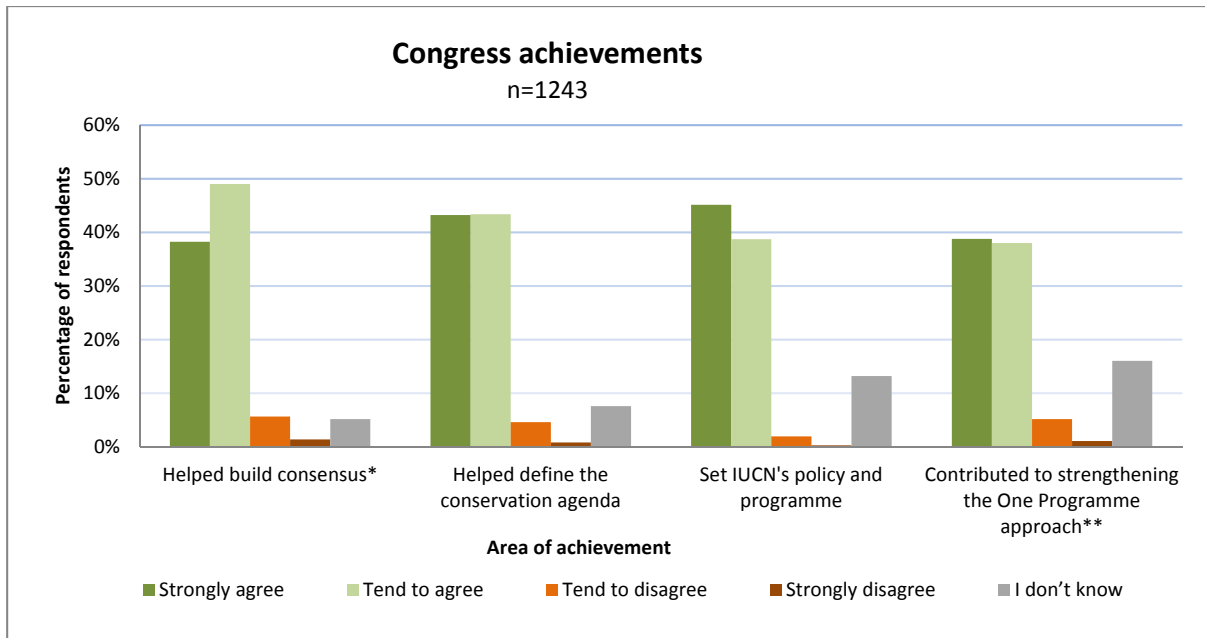
1.1 A note about the data

This report is based on several data sources: a post-event satisfaction survey sent by email to 6672 participants, out of a total registration of 8633¹, a feedback form sent to all IUCN Secretariat staff that attended (356 staff), and debriefing sessions held by the staff in the Congress Unit. Session surveys were a new feedback mechanism introduced via the app, but due to the low response rate the data is primarily being used to inform the design of a better way to assess specific sessions and participant learning in future. The participant survey was filled in by 1373 respondents, of which approximately half attended both the Forum and Members Assembly. The resulting findings are presented here in aggregate as the responses were fairly homogenous across different demographic categories (age, gender, professional affiliation, etc.).

¹ The survey was sent to all registered media, IUCN staff and participants. It was not sent to volunteers, support staff, security, entourage, booth personnel, or participants for whom no individual email was received (e.g. participants registered through group registrations).

2 Overall satisfaction

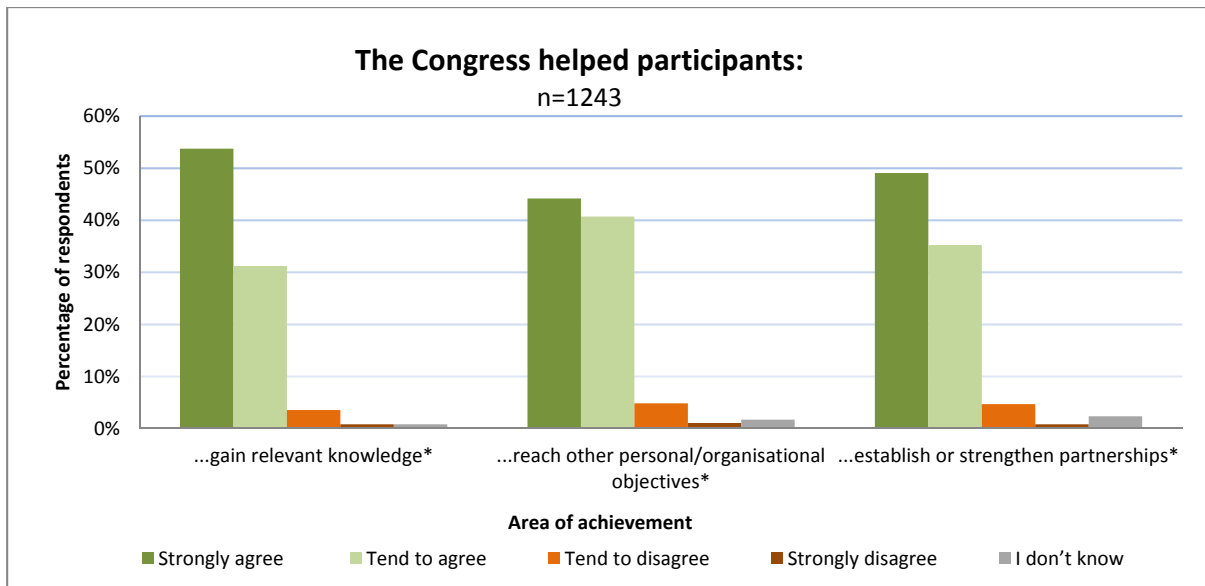
Participants regard the IUCN Congress very highly in terms of its contribution not only to setting the global agenda but also to strengthening the unique association of Member organisations, Commissions and Secretariat staff that make up the Union, and that strive to work in a “One Programme Approach”.



The specific survey question was: “The 2016 IUCN Congress:

- *provided opportunities to build consensus on conservation issues.
- **provided opportunities to develop or strengthen programme initiatives that involve different parts of IUCN (e.g.: Members, Commissions, Secretariat).”

Participants also highly value the Congress for what it helps them achieve personally and professionally: in particular they report that they gain relevant knowledge, with 77% of the participants (n=387) who rated sessions in the app saying that they were likely or very likely to use the information from the session in the next two months. Based on the participant survey, 87% of participants (n=1134, chart not shown) agreed that they would be able to use or share the new information they gained from the Forum within two months.

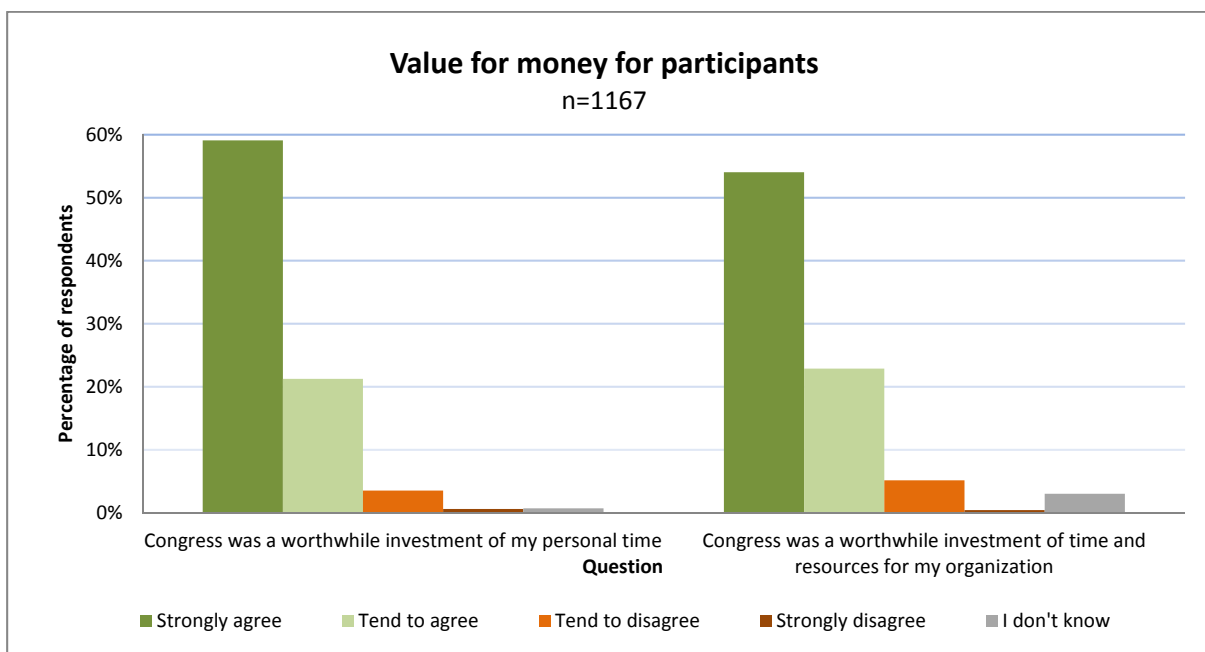


*The question text was “The 2016 IUCN Congress:

- allowed you to gain knowledge relevant to your work
- allowed you to reach other personal/organisational objectives
- allowed you to establish new partnerships or to strengthen existing partnerships”

2.1 Value for money

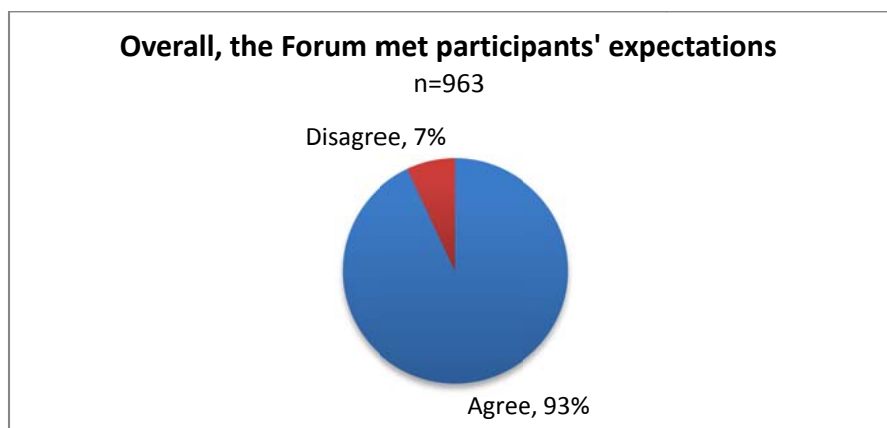
The Congress is clearly seen as good value for money by the individuals who attend: 80% believe it was a worthwhile investment of their personal time, and 77% believe it was a worthwhile use of their organisation’s time and resources. Suggestions for improvement received in the open-ended questions of the survey were used to inform the lessons learned and recommendations for improving future Congresses.



3 The Forum

The four-day Forum offered 1251 sessions to over 6000 participants. With this number of events, at each time slot up to 45 sessions² could be running in parallel, and 62% of participants felt this was too many. Comments from participants and IUCN staff show that the Forum would benefit from being simplified and streamlined. Some of the disadvantages of a large Forum are that parallel sessions on the same topic can lead to low attendance at individual sessions.

That said, 93% of participants agreed that, overall, the Forum met their expectations, with majority agreement about the excellent value of the Forum for learning and networking.



3.1 Navigating the Forum

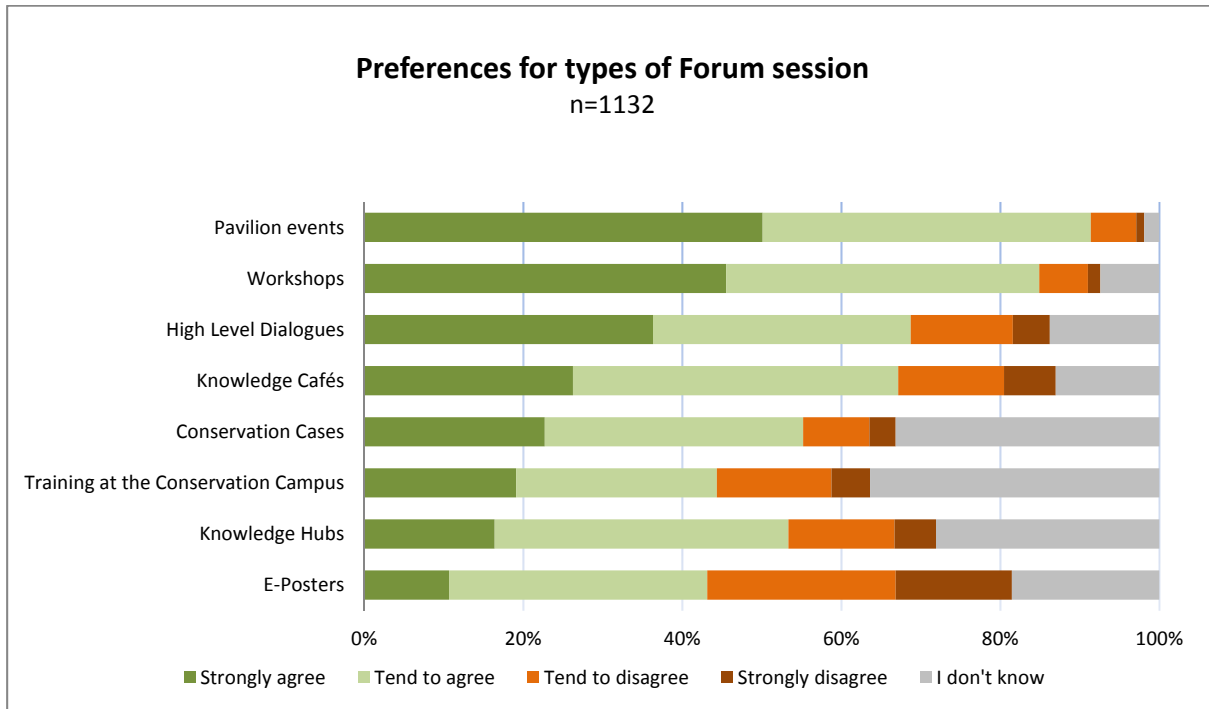
IUCN provided the app, online programme and on-site screens to help participants make sense of the Programme and identify sessions of interest. The app enabled participants to search the programme, though some differences in how this worked between the web and mobile versions need to be improved. Participants report that they were most likely to choose events by searching for a topic of interest (as opposed to a speaker, organisation, or session type), but personal recommendations or following a thematic journey were the next common means of choosing sessions to attend. Though the majority of respondents report that they had sufficient information to make these choices, up to 20% of participants participating in the Forum may not have used the app at all, and in the comments participants requested other means (e.g. a paper programme or a PDF of the programme), so IUCN should consider offering other “low-tech” options next time and ensure that the app is compatible with older devices.

3.2 Popularity of each type of Forum session

The four-day Forum offered eight different types of session, some that were selected through a call for contributions coordinated by the central organising team and others that were selected by the Pavilion leads. The data in the chart below show that nearly all participants were familiar with Pavilion events – even more so than workshops – suggesting that the less formal set-up of the

² Including not only workshops, but also Pavilion events, knowledge cafés, and conservation campus sessions.

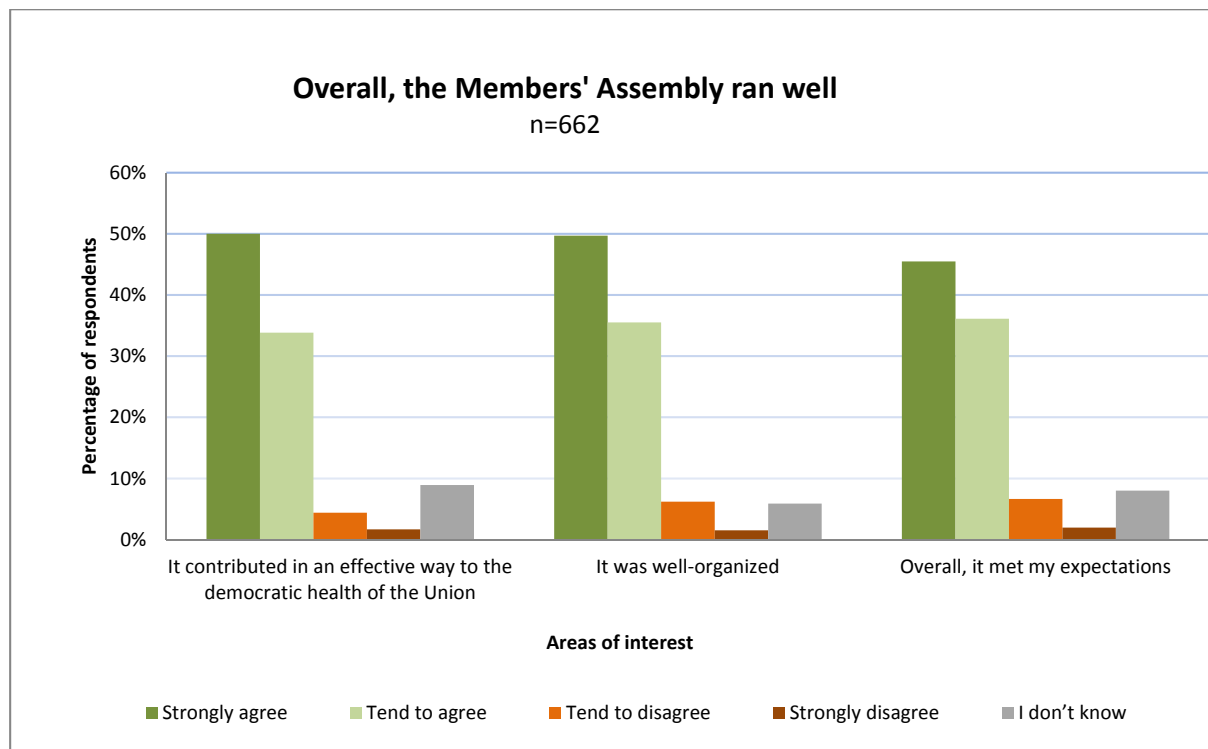
Pavilions may be more desirable to forum attendees. In light of the mixed reviews (including lack of opinion indicating a possible lack of awareness), IUCN will consider simplifying the Forum by reducing the types of different events. The final and clear message is the relatively higher disagreement with the value of e-posters. This is an area that requires further investigation and work for improvement.



The Forum is clearly a very popular event that is highly valued by participants because it delivers what they are interested in: learning and networking. However, unless IUCN can resist the demand to continue increasing the number of open session slots, it is at risk of becoming a victim of its own popularity. IUCN is now considering how to streamline and focus the Forum to further improve the participant experience while delivering more concrete outcomes.

4 The Members' Assembly

The Members' Assembly ran immediately after the Forum, attended by 797 of IUCN's Members and a further 46 who were represented by a proxy vote. This represents 80 % of IUCN's Membership in category A and 70% in category B³. Members sent from one to more than 20 staff to participate in the debate and take decisions on key aspects of IUCN's governance, policy and programme⁴. The Assembly ran smoothly and transparently. The major new achievement was the new Motions process that was successfully rolled out with 85 Resolutions and Recommendations discussed online during a two-month period and subsequently adopted via online voting pre-Congress and 14 motions discussed more thoroughly and voted on-site. To further improve the running of the Assembly, survey respondents requested better training on the electronic voting session and rules of conduct in the future.



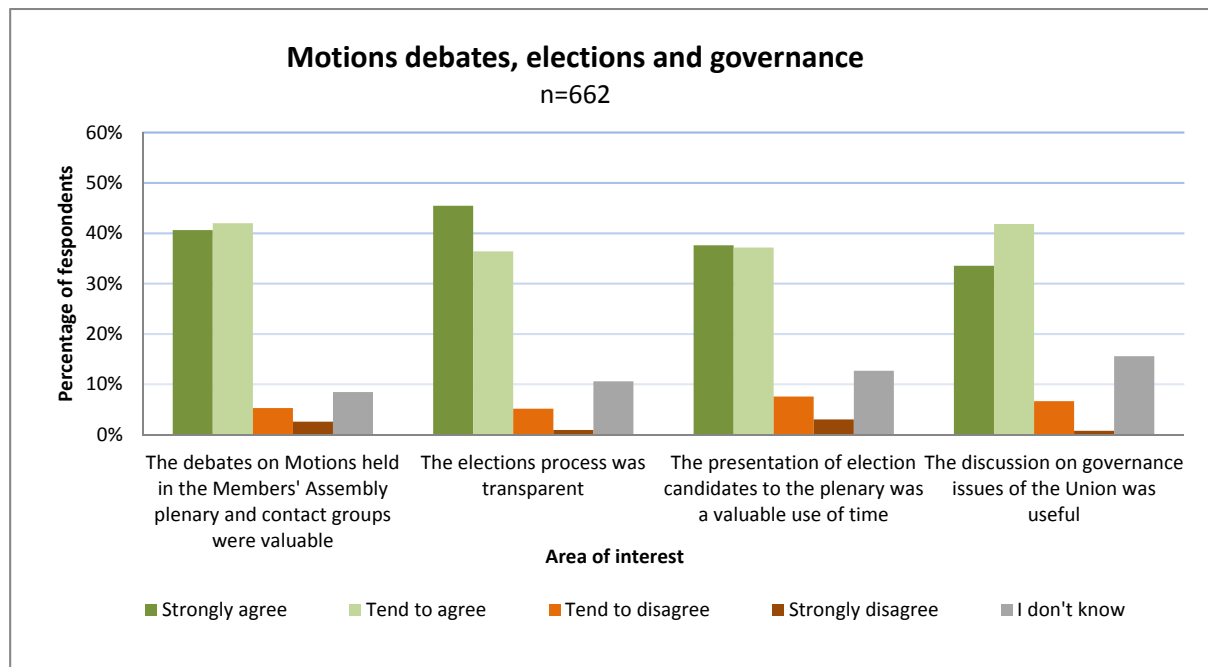
4.1 Aspects of IUCN's Governance

Again, satisfaction levels are very high but running the survey helped point out areas for improvement. The following chart shows participant perspectives on key aspects of IUCN's governance that are handled at the Members' Assembly. 82% of participants attending the Members' Assembly agreed or strongly agreed that the debates on motions in plenary and contact groups were valuable. However, the new Motions process and resulting changes to the Assembly agenda were a learning process, and the management, scheduling and communication of Contact

³ Category A and B are IUCN Membership accreditation categories. Attendance includes both physical presence, and representation through proxy votes.

⁴ An estimated 1300-1400 individuals took part in the Members' Assembly.

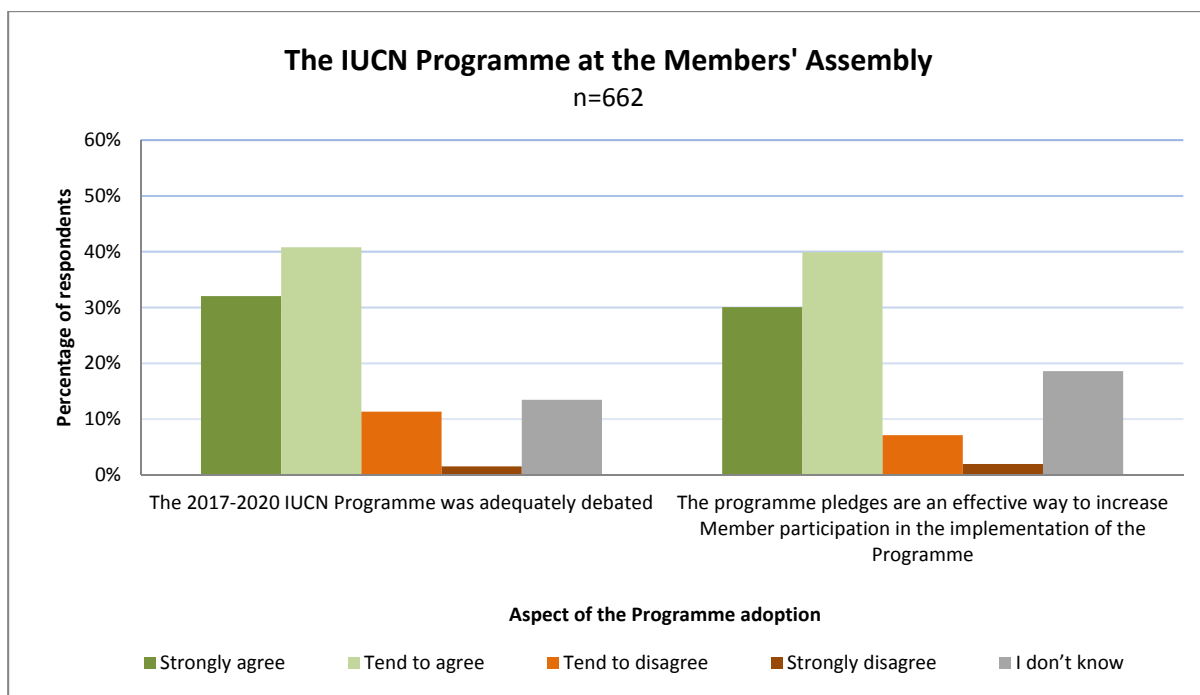
Groups for motions should be revised for the next Congress. Participants also requested a more engaging way to present the candidates for election.



4.2 Debating and adopting the IUCN Programme

Although 73% of participants believe the 2017-2020 Intersessional Programme was adequately debated before being adopted by the Membership, a number of areas for improvement of the process were raised. To avoid last-minute amendments to the Programme and ensure all Members have the exact final text they will vote on, a pre-Congress amendments deadline should be set. This would enable deeper on-site discussion about how to implement it, and open the possibility to focus on Members' commitment to the Programme through the pledge process. The process of making pledges to demonstrate commitment to specific areas of the Programme was new in 2016 and had disappointing results. The reasons for this are most likely the last-minute nature and low awareness of it, as evidenced by the high proportion of "I don't know" responses in the chart below.

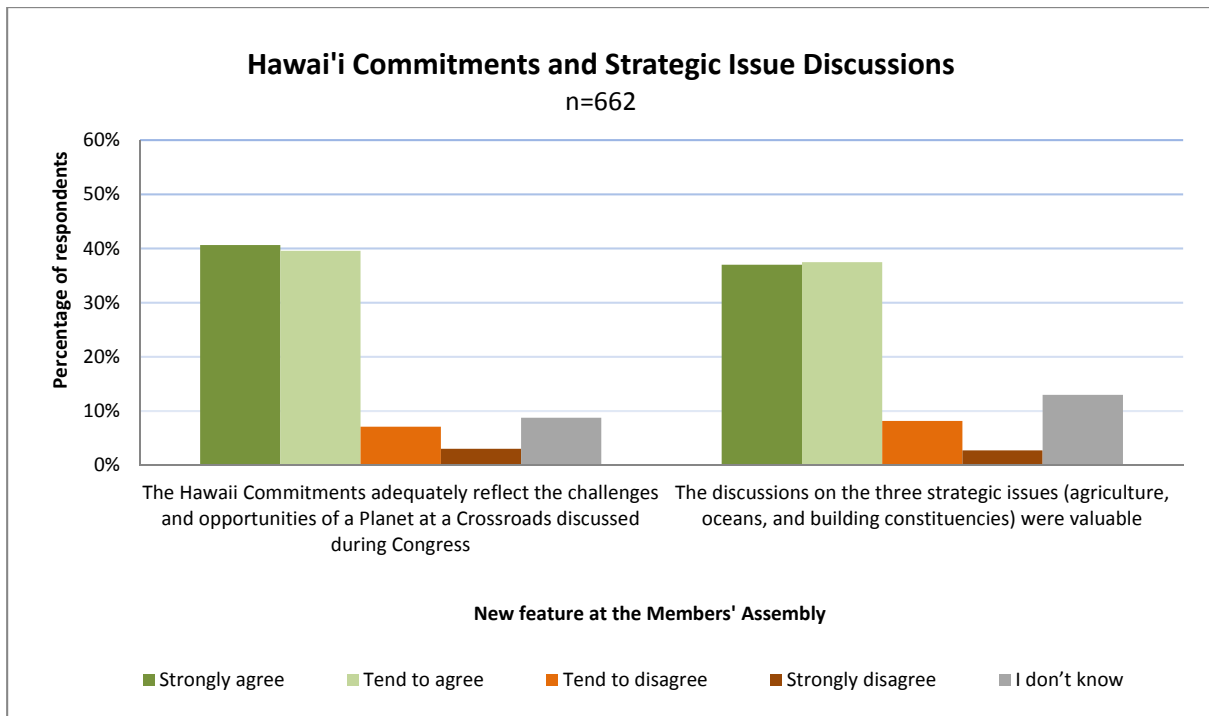
Staff have suggested that the motions should also be more clearly linked to the intersessional Programme, in which case the pre-Congress timeline for the preparation and discussion of Motions should also be re-considered and aligned with the preparation of the draft intersessional Programme.



4.3 New features: Hawai'i Commitments and Strategic Topic Discussions

The Hawai'i Commitments were supposed to reflect the challenges and opportunities discussed during Congress and of the participants who attended the Assembly (mostly Members), 81% felt that they achieved this, but 19% disagreed or did not know. Whilst not a bad result, coming from the Membership who can be expected to be among the most informed participants, we expect that participants of only the Forum would be even less likely to be aware or supportive of the Hawai'i Commitments. This signals room for improvement on the design and communication of both the process and outcome for any similar endeavour at the next Congress.

The introduction of discussions around strategic issues in the Members' Assembly agenda received mixed feedback, with the main recommendation being the need to make them more participatory and more clearly linked to the programme.



5 Conclusions

The 2016 IUCN Congress in Hawai'i was one of the largest, most complex, best attended and most favourably reviewed. IUCN should be proud of this achievement and encouraged by the quality of input and outputs. However, there is always room for improvement, especially in areas of the programme where innovative ideas were tested. The suggestions made throughout this report, along with many more detailed lessons learned and reviewed by IUCN's leadership will be carefully considered for the preparation of the 2020 World Conservation Congress.