
IUCN – The World Conservation Union

Review of the Species Survival Commission

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26 June, 2000.

Preface

This is the report of a triennial end-term review of the IUCN Species Survival Commission, undertaken in accordance with Resolution 19.2 of the General Assembly of the Union, held in Buenos Aires in 1994. This review forms part of an exercise in which four of the Union's six Commissions are being reviewed prior to the 2000 World Conservation Congress. The relationship between this report and the forthcoming general report on the four reviews is explained in section 1.1.

As arrangements for the review were only finalised in March 2000, and as the time available for performing it was by then very limited, it has not been possible to go into all aspects of the terms of reference (Annex 1) in depth. Nevertheless, I hope that readers will ultimately find this small contribution to be accurate and useful. A draft report was submitted on 24 April. I am grateful for the comments that I received. I have tried to take them into account in this final version.

One of those comments was that recommendations should be made more clearly. In the draft, I had been diffident about making recommendations on the basis of so brief an acquaintance. In this final version, I have indicated a number of recommendations *in bold italics*.

I am grateful to the chair of the SSC, David Brackett, for inviting me to attend and observe the strategic planning meeting and the Executive Committee meeting that he convened at White Oak, Florida, between 20 and 24 March. I appreciated the welcome and assistance I received that week from him and all those Commission members and Secretariat staff who attended the meetings. It was an ideal opportunity to learn about the work of the Commission, and it left me impressed by the dedication and commitment of its leaders.

In eight working days (including two days' travel) it is certainly not possible to do justice to the wealth of quality effort that SSC's work represents. I greatly appreciate David Brackett's suggestion that some additional days might be made available to help me make this a slightly less inadequate effort, and I very much regret that earlier commitments have made it impossible for me to take him up on the idea.

In the IUCN Secretariat, Simon Stuart was particularly helpful in setting up this assignment and providing me with information. I am grateful for all his patient assistance.

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Abbreviations

CEESP	Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy
CEM	Commission on Ecosystem Management
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
SG	Specialist Group
SIS	Species Information System
SSC	Species Survival Commission
SUI	Sustainable Use Initiative
SUSG	Sustainable Use Specialist Group
TOR	terms of reference

Summary

This brief triennial end-term review of the Species Survival Commission is part of an exercise in which four of IUCN's Commissions are being reviewed prior to the 2000 World Conservation Congress. An abbreviated version of this report will be included in the overall report on the four reviews that will be the primary product of the exercise. Generic issues that affect other Commissions as well as SSC receive further treatment in that report.

The **rationale for the SSC's mandate and goals** is sound. Its commitment to the conservation of species threatened with extinction and of those important for human welfare is centrally important for the future of this planet's biosphere and of human life within it. Through a major strategic planning effort during 1999 and 2000, SSC has developed an enhanced and streamlined statement of vision, goal, objectives and targets that enhances its prospects of fulfilling its mandate and of maintaining its relevance.

To date, it has not been easy to gauge the **effectiveness of SSC**. Although its Strategic Plan for the 1997-1999 triennium had started to take on programmatic form, the Commission did not have the **monitoring and evaluation** capacity or process to provide this review with data on which to base an assessment of its performance. As a more focused programme is prepared for the coming 2001-2004 triennium, this M&E challenge becomes more urgent. SSC should plan to meet it as soon as possible. Upgrading SSC M&E is a clear opportunity for collaboration with the rest of IUCN.

Overall, expert opinion is that **SSC's wide ranging scientific work on the conservation status of species continues to have significant positive effects**. However, the effect of the Commission's scientific work remains limited by its partial coverage of the world's biodiversity. Furthermore, despite the quality and importance of its data on species survival, SSC acknowledges that **the information it generates is not as effective as it should be because it is not adequately structured, accessible and disseminated**. It has taken various steps to remedy this situation, most notably by developing a **Species Information System** that promises to be a major new global resource. It is important that adequate funding be provided to exploit the full potential of the SIS.

SSC is active in a number of global biodiversity **policy** fora, and deploys its expertise there to significant positive effect. Through its Sustainable Use Specialist Group and the IUCN Sustainable Use Initiative, SSC has achieved a useful impact on local and international action to promote the **sustainable use** of natural resources. SSC's **Wildlife Trade** Programme remains highly effective as a key provider of scientific advice to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna, and some of the Specialist Groups play a leading and positive – because perceived as impartial - role in CITES debates and decisions. **Action Plans** on many endangered species have been a key SSC output over recent years. But SSC needs to complete its assessment of the effectiveness and the continuing value of this sort of product.

SSC and the Union need to give careful attention to the **relationship between SSC's goals and objectives and those of IUCN as a whole**. Both have recently been restated for the 2001-2004 triennium, in SSC's draft Strategic Plan and IUCN's draft Programme. There is little doubt that SSC is expected to be a major contributor to the implementation of the Union's new Programme. In general terms, the SSC's Strategic Plan is relevant to the IUCN's Programme. Its successful implementation will help the Union achieve its goals for the triennium. In detail, however, much needs to be done to reconcile the two sets of targets and intended results.

Beyond these significant challenges of corporate responsibility for SSC within IUCN, there are pressing issues of **SSC relevance** to the broader population of conservation stakeholders around the world. While most of these people clearly still support the work of the Commission, SSC certainly has no room for complacency in this regard. With its now 50 year old roots in a very different world of collegial relations between post-war scientists, SSC clearly has an ongoing obligation to prove its relevance and competence for 21st century conservation endeavour.

There are a growing number of sectors and initiatives in which the Commission should accept a constructive but minor role. Indeed, key advice from a leading southern African member of SSC is that IUCN (and, by extension, SSC) generally does best in a supportive, rather than a proprietary, role.

As the Commission evolves towards a more centralised, programmatically managed mode of operations, there is a real risk that the rank and file of SSC members feel left out and lose enthusiasm. Already, SSC management faces a major challenge in achieving Specialist Group buy in to the strategic planning process. SSC will have to work hard over the coming triennium to maintain and marshal the commitment of its membership while achieving reasonable levels of programmatic performance.

At the time of this review, the Gland Secretariat **budget** for Species Programme operations was in a healthier position than usual. But some of the Commission's key projects – notably the Red List Programme and the SIS – still had substantial funding shortfalls. There is wide variation among the SGs with regard to current finances. Because of the recent emphasis on fund raising for large grants to key SSC projects, operational grants to the smaller and poorer SGs have dwindled. This threatens the character and viability of parts of the network.

While SSC appears to manage its resources responsibly and enjoys a measure of support from a range of funding agencies, its **financial sustainability** is not assured. Its challenge over the next triennium, as it works on a more focused strategic plan within a revitalised IUCN Programme, will be to demonstrate the continuing quality and effectiveness of its work and thereby to persuade donors that they should increase their allocations to it.

While not everyone in SSC endorses the more centralised, structured and programme-driven **management** style of the current leadership, many have appreciated the way it enables the Commission to fulfil more of the roles that they feel the Union as a whole should be playing.

In its current transitional circumstances, while SSC still lacks most of the features and resources of a conventional programme-focused organisation, it is being managed at least as effectively as might be expected. Considering how little time and money they have for the task, SSC's leadership are making commendable progress in focusing the Commission's efforts on a specified set of objectives through the new Strategic Plan. This focusing of effort represents a substantive upgrade on the planning and management of the Strategic Plan for the previous triennium.

Specialist Group Chairs are in the forefront of IUCN's delicate task of combining scientific impartiality with environmental and social commitment. At the same time they must contribute both upwards and downwards in the governance of the Commission, linking up to the Steering and Executive Committees and down to the membership of their respective SGs. At present, SSC lacks the resources to support and guide them in these tasks. It needs particularly to find a more thorough way to orientate new Chairs after they are appointed.

Despite its importance to IUCN and its strong working links with its Secretariat staff in Gland, **SSC does not have adequate ties with the rest of the Union**. It has yet fully to reconcile its programme with the more recently drafted Programme of the Union as a whole (although good progress has recently been made), and there are very few links between SSC programmes and those of other Commissions. Meanwhile, as it expands its social science capacity and takes on project management and programme execution, there is a risk that SSC takes on too many roles that other parts of the Union can or should perform. Both the Secretariat and the SSC leadership need to consult more closely on **how to build synergy and avoid duplication**.

Voluntarism remains a vexed issue for SSC. So far, however, the scientific and environmental attractions of volunteering to work as an SSC member outweigh the costs in the perception of thousands of leading scholars around the world. A more immediate problem with voluntarism concerns the Chairs of its Specialist Groups. Volunteers with other, full time jobs are unlikely to cope much longer with the management of increasingly complex SGs with their multiple programmes and staff. This review endorses SSC's intention to investigate voluntarism in the Commission through a small task force, which should report to the SSC Steering Committee at the October 2000 World Conservation Congress.

A key challenge now is for SSC to respond positively to the major **changes in the IUCN context** that are embodied in the Union's change of leadership and the newly focused character of its forthcoming Programme. The response can be supportive or questioning, but it should at all times be proactive and committed.

In response to the changing institutional context within which it works, and its growing realisation of the enormity of its scientific task, **SSC should strengthen its collaborative stance as one partner among many**. SSC is not going to play the leading role as repository of data or leader of conservation action for all species. While there are signs that this realisation is spreading among the Commission's leadership, SSC needs to give higher priority to the challenge of forming new working alliances over the coming triennium.

1. Introduction

1.1. Reviews of IUCN Commissions, 2000

This report forms part of a broader process of reviewing four IUCN Commissions between March and May, 2000. At its 51st meeting on 7-9 February 2000, the IUCN Council decided that, in accordance with Resolution 19.2 of the 1994 Buenos Aires General Assembly, triennial end-term reviews should be carried out of the Species Survival Commission (SSC) and of the Commission on Environmental Law (CEL). More detailed, 'in-depth' reviews should be undertaken of the Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP) and of the Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM).

Arrangements for these reviews were only finalised in March 2000, and draft reports were required in late May. Available time and resources meant that not even the full period between start up and draft report submission could be devoted to the substantial task of reviewing the four Commissions. It was agreed that the consultants undertaking the reviews would submit one overall draft report on their work to the Bureau of Council in late May. The reviewers then finalised the report in June (Bruszt and Turner, 2000). It offers the reviewers' general comments on the issues of key concern for the Union that arose from their work with the four Commissions. It also contains sections offering their specific comments on each of the Commissions that are being reviewed this year, with a more detailed analysis offered for CEESP and CEM than for SSC and CEL. The comments on SSC in the overall report are drawn from this separate review, which it was possible to contract and report on separately (section 1.2).

In both their general and their specific comments, the reviewers were guided by the generic terms of reference that the IUCN Secretariat has drawn up for Commission reviews. The preparation of these TOR reflects Council's desire, as expressed at its February meeting, for 'a standard set of criteria for SSC reviews'.

1.2. This review

SSC had scheduled a strategic planning meeting and a meeting of its Executive Committee for 20-24 March 2000. These meetings offered an ideal opportunity to learn about the Commission's work and thinking first hand, and fortunately it was possible for me to attend them. For administrative reasons the SSC review was contracted separately from the broader review task outlined in section 1.1 above, with a requirement for a separate report. This brief end-term review is based largely on what I heard during the March meetings, and on the documentation I received then and afterwards from the Commission and the IUCN Secretariat. It responds to the specific TOR set out for the SSC review (Annex 1), which are a replica of the generic TOR referred to above.

1.3. This report

A summary of this report was included as a chapter on SSC within the overall report on the four Commission reviews (Bruszt and Turner, 2000). Even in the current, slightly longer, format it cannot hope to do justice to the variety, depth and impact of the work done by SSC's approximately 7,000 members.

I considered two ways of structuring this brief assessment. One way would be to offer an analysis of the background of SSC and then to move on to the current key issues, opportunities and challenges in its work. The second approach, more in accordance with Council's wishes, is to respond, item by item, to the questions raised in the generic TOR and reflected in the TOR for the SSC review. (The latter TOR acknowledge that 'since this is an end of term review, it... will not be possible to go into depth on each of these points.') In the interests of consistency across the four current reviews, and for ease of comparison by future reviewers who may also follow the generic TOR that have now been established, I have adopted the second approach. This leads to a slightly more mechanical presentation, but may be more useful in the long run. It also has the advantage of being easier to write in the two working days that have been available for the task.

2. Effectiveness

2.1. Measuring the effectiveness of the SSC

It is not easy to gauge the effectiveness of the SSC during a quick review like this one. The previous SSC Strategic Plan did not include measurable targets, which has made it difficult to assess the Commission's progress in meeting the objectives it had set for itself (IUCN, 2000a, 6). Over recent months, as it has prepared its Strategic Plan for the 2001-2004 triennium, SSC has tried hard to come up with a shorter set of 'SMART' (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely) objectives and outputs against which progress can be more feasibly measured in the years to come.

This recent planning exercise has reminded SSC of a deeper problem in the management and assessment of its activities. Although, at some levels, it is taking on more and more of the character of a structured, targeted programme, SSC actually remains a network of Specialist Groups (SGs), which are themselves networks with varying degrees of focus and programmatic structure. There is debate about the degree to which it is appropriate or feasible for SSC to confine its work within a coordinated programme and to monitor its performance on this basis. Most people agree that such an approach can enhance the measurable effectiveness of the Commission with regard to a limited number of specified objectives. But they also acknowledge that the richness and depth of the combined knowledge and effort of all SSC's members and SGs should not be compromised in the process. As was pointed out during the March 2000 planning meeting, there are probably many positive local SSC impacts of which Commission management never hears. SSC's work has many unplanned effects. For a body like SSC, that is the way it should be. Available evidence suggests that most of these unplanned effects are positive.

Empirical monitoring of progress against objectives set out in a logical framework will be a substantial challenge. *SSC should plan as soon as possible to meet this challenge.* Capacity and resources for this purpose are hard to identify. In a telling development during the March 2000 planning process, it was decided to convert the 'targets' that had been listed for one of the next triennium's four objectives into 'operational principles'. These principles would be expected to serve as a general guide for the Commission's work (with regard to networking and collaboration within the global scientific community). As such, they could not of course be monitored in the same way as empirical targets. Planning decisions of this sort reflect the Commission's accurate view that the rigours of the logical framework are not entirely appropriate for its character and purpose.

2.2. An estimate of the effectiveness of the SSC

It therefore comes as no surprise that the SSC's report for the 1997-1999 triennium does not systematically assess performance with regard to its mandate or to the six goals and 11 objectives that the Commission had set itself for that period (Brackett, 2000). The mandate, goals and objectives are set out in the boxes below, as are the simpler statements adopted for the coming triennium. They all revolve around some core functions:

- generating scientific information about the conservation status of species and the threats to their survival;
- publishing and disseminating these data;
- using these data to influence decisions and policies relating to biodiversity;
- promoting the sustainable use of natural resources;
- promoting the implementation of selected programmes and initiatives that address threats to species survival;

- promoting broader awareness, commitment and collaboration among the world's scientists with regard to species survival;
- building capacity, particularly within SSC, to perform the above functions.

SSC's wide ranging scientific work on the conservation status of species continues to have significant positive effects. Many of its SGs continue to play key roles in developing knowledge, stimulating awareness and articulating action in their respective fields. As a result of SSC's work on maintaining, expanding and upgrading its Red List programme, global awareness and action with regard to threatened species are being

SSC mandate, 1997-1999

Mission

To conserve biological diversity by developing and executing programmes to study, save, restore and manage wisely species and their habitats.

Purpose

SSC serves as the principal source of advice to the Union and its members on the technical aspects of species conservation. It seeks to mobilise action by the world conservation community on behalf of species, in particular those threatened with extinction and those of importance for human welfare. It achieves this by providing leadership with the following six goals:

- to assess the conservation status of and threats to species worldwide, so as to generate recommendations and strategies necessary for the conservation of biological diversity;*
- to identify conservation priorities for species and their habitats;*
- to promote the implementation of specific recommended actions for the survival of species;*
- to develop and promote policies for the conservation of species and their habitats;*
- to enhance the efforts of individuals working on biodiversity conservation by linking them and providing access to an international forum;*
- to promote an understanding of the importance of the conservation of species to the well-being of people.*

Objectives

- to strengthen the existing SSC network to gather information, set priorities, stimulate action, develop policies, and provide advice for the conservation of biodiversity;*
- to utilise the SSC's expertise to address biodiversity conservation needs more effectively at the regional, national and sub-national levels;*
- to assess the status of all groups of species determined to be a priority as rapidly as possible;*
- to develop an effective and responsive global information system for the conservation of species;*
- to position the SSC as a major advisor for key intergovernmental mechanisms relevant to the conservation of biodiversity;*
- to strengthen the ability of the SSC to evaluate the ecological impact of uses of wild species and promote improved wildlife management;*
- to improve the SSC's capacity to communicate priority recommendations and policies to promote the implementation of actions needed for the survival of species;*
- to monitor and evaluate the activities of the SSC to maximise its effectiveness;*
- to increase the management capacity of the SSC;*
- to strengthen the SSC's ability to generate support for its programmes and to diversify its funding base;*
- to develop the human resources of the network to deal more effectively with conservation challenges and issues throughout the world.*

steadily enhanced. Over the past triennium, the inclusion of lists of threatened plants and trees have been key achievements - followed, more recently, by a major effort to revise the scientific categories, criteria and guidelines on which the Red List process is based. The continued effectiveness of this core function of the Commission will depend on the success of current efforts to introduce the revised process to SGs, establish Red List Authorities, and resolve the much debated issue of forming national Red List authorities.

However, the effect of the Commission's scientific work on species survival remains limited by its partial coverage of the world's biodiversity. Apart from the vast challenge of addressing plant biodiversity, various areas of animal life remain inadequately covered by SSC SGs and scholarship – most marine and freshwater fish, for example. There is growing realisation that the original taxon-based approach to threatened animal

species through SGs must be adapted as a wider range of biodiversity is tackled – particularly with regard to plants, reptiles and amphibians, where regionally structured SGs may be more appropriate.

SSC Triennial Programme, 1997-1999

The **mission** and **goals** set out in the triennial programme are the same as the mission and purpose statements in the Commission's mandate.

Strategic objectives

1. *To utilise SSC's expertise to address biodiversity conservation needs more effectively at the regional, national and sub-national levels.*
2. *To assess as rapidly as possible the status of all groups of species determined to be a priority.*
3. *To strengthen the ability of SSC to evaluate the ecological impact of uses of wild species and promote improved wildlife management.*
4. *To develop an effective and responsive global information system for the conservation of species.*
5. *To position SSC as a major adviser for key intergovernmental mechanisms relevant to the conservation of biodiversity.*
6. *To improve SSC's capacity to communicate priority recommendations and policies to promote the implementation of actions needed for the survival of species.*
7. *To strengthen the existing SSC network to gather information, set priorities, stimulate action, develop policies, and provide advice for the conservation of biodiversity.*
8. *To monitor and evaluate the activities of SSC to maximise its effectiveness.*
9. *To increase the management capacity of SSC.*
10. *To develop the human resources of the network to deal more effectively with conservation challenges and issues throughout the world.*
11. *To strengthen SSC's ability to generate support for its programmes and to diversify its funding base.*

Draft logical framework of SSC Strategic Plan, 2000

Vision

A world that values and conserves present levels of biodiversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.

Goal

The extinction crisis and massive loss in biodiversity are universally adopted as a shared responsibility, resulting in action to reduce this loss of diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.

Objectives

1. Decisions and policies affecting biodiversity influenced by providing recommendations and guidelines based on sound interdisciplinary scientific information.
2. Users of natural resources encouraged to adopt modes of production and consumption that promote the conservation of biodiversity.
3. A greater commitment promoted among the scientific community to the conservation, sustainable use and management of biodiversity and increased integration of findings across disciplines.
4. Capacity to provide timely, innovative and practical solutions to conservation problems increased.

Despite the quality and importance of its data on species survival, SSC acknowledges that the information it generates is not as effective as it should be because it is not adequately structured, accessible and disseminated. Significant progress was made in addressing this constraint during the 1997-1999 triennium. The Red List can now be accessed on the World Wide Web, and the Commission's web site provides a substantial amount of information about its work. SSC has made a major contribution to the ongoing development of the IUCN digital library, although much work remains to be done in this regard. The Commission is a major contributor to the IUCN Publications Programme, which has disseminated a wide range of documents emanating from SSC in recent years – including more than 50 Action Plans on various species. However, more needs to be done to enhance the media contacts and skills of SSC and its SGs, so that the Commission's light does not remain under a bushel.

In addition to its contributions to the development of the multi-partner Biodiversity Conservation Information System, the primary initiative the Commission has taken with regard to species data is its

development of a Species Information System, which is currently at an advanced pilot stage. The SIS is to be launched at the October 2000 World Conservation Congress in Amman. If adequately resourced (and the recent provision of support by the Government of Italy is an important step in this regard) the SIS can do much to enhance SSC's effectiveness in deploying its scientific data base to promote species survival. However, the role of SSC and its SIS as the world's central species information provider is not assured. The SIS is not the only such information service available, although the Commission believes that it will offer significantly more detail and higher quality than its competitors. Two major donors declined to support the SIS, although one has invited SSC to resubmit its proposal. Overall, although SSC has worked hard to enhance the effectiveness of its knowledge base, some years of further effort will be needed before its contribution and impact in this regard are assured.

SSC is active in a number of global biodiversity policy fora, and deploys its expertise there to significant positive effect. It makes a range of contributions to the ongoing work of the Convention on Biological Diversity. In a number of more specific policy sectors, SSC has had a clearly positive impact. These include its work on Guidelines for Re-Introductions, Guidelines for the Placement of Confiscated Animals and its work with the Global Invasive Species Programme.

Through its Sustainable Use Specialist Group (SUSG) and the IUCN Sustainable Use Initiative (SUI), SSC has achieved a useful impact on local and international action to promote the sustainable use of natural resources. (Whether the focus should be on 'wild' plants and animals or on all natural resources remains a matter of debate.) 'Sustainable use' is a controversial concept both within and beyond the SSC and IUCN. While the relationship between the large SUSG, the SUI and the rest of the Commission and Union has confused many people, there is little doubt that the regionalisation and decentralisation of the SUSG over recent years has enhanced its capacity to influence local action on sustainable use issues. Some would argue that social scientists and/or proponents of sustainable use have no place in a natural science/conservation orientated Commission like SSC. But the balance of opinion (and the view of the SUSG Chair) is that the current integration makes the SSC more effective in dealing with the interface between conservation and livelihood imperatives. In many developing countries, the continued legitimacy of the SSC and its species survival commitment rests heavily on the SSC's and IUCN's perceived commitment to sustainable use.

Many of the Commission's efforts to promote action for species survival are linked to its commitment to sustainable use. SSC's Wildlife Trade Programme remains highly effective as a key provider of scientific advice to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and some of the SGs play a leading and positive – because perceived as impartial - role in CITES debates and decisions. This was most recently evidenced in the April 2000 CITES debates in Nairobi on trade in ivory – one of many such processes at which IUCN has provided essential mediation and the African Elephant Specialist Group has provided strong technical support. This group also plays an important role in the recently developed Monitoring System for the Illegal Killing of Elephants. In addition to its wide ranging work with CITES, SSC has made an effective contribution to policy development for medicinal plants (through its eponymous SG). It has also worked usefully with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations on the conservation and sustainable use of other economically important wild plants.

The first key initiative by SSC in its shift beyond scientific data gathering to the promotion of conservation action was the development of Action Plans for various species. As was noted above, more than 50 of these Plans have now been published. While they have an important impact in generating awareness of conservation priorities, the effectiveness of the Action Plans in promoting species survival is less clear. SSC had intended to undertake a review of the Action Plan concept during the 1997-1999 triennium, and a review of the recommendations of 42 Action Plans was undertaken. ***Completing a review of the overall concept – by seeing how effective those recommendations have been - should be a priority in the coming triennium.***

The key role and scientific prestige of SSC continue to be internationally known, and are especially well regarded in developing countries, where membership of the Commission is regarded as an important scientific honour and career achievement. To date, however, SSC's progress in promoting more effective collaboration among the world's scientists has been mixed. This is partly because of the limited attention and resources that have been devoted to this task, during a period when the Commission's resources were dwindling in real terms and tended to be focused on its own 'core products'. More fundamentally, it is

because SSC has been slow to recognise that it is not, and cannot be, the leader in every field of study and action with regard to species survival. It cannot afford to assume a guiding or dominant role in each such initiative. ***It must recognise the real value of collaboration, and the real impact it can have in subsidiary roles in some research and conservation programmes.*** The planning process for the next triennium has shown an increasing awareness of these realities among the Commission's leaders, as well as a new commitment to promoting a broader collaborative effort towards achievement of the SSC vision for species survival. In some areas of the Commission's work, particularly its newer or currently expanding fields such as plant conservation, this principle of collaboration is already well established.

While the scientific capacity of individual SSC members is still assured, the capacity of these members and of the SGs to perform the evolving functions of the Commission needs constantly to be built. In recent years, SSC has focused this capacity building work on its core activities, notably the Red List process and its work on wildlife trade. The active commitment of many Commission members to this work reflects the positive effect of much of this capacity building. However, much new effort will be needed to orientate SGs with regard to the revised Red List criteria and procedures, and the use and development of the Species Information System.

Less progress has been made in building the human resource and financial capacity of the Commission and its SGs. Partly this is because of the limits on human resource capacity that are imposed by the voluntary nature of the network (section 8). Partly it is because the financial resources of the Commission and the SGs remain slender (section 5). Most parts of the Commission lack the support staff they need to exploit the full potential of this voluntary network. Chairs of SGs dealing with the more controversial species find that they need political and diplomatic skills with which their scientific training has not provided them and which the Commission can do little to help them build. Perhaps it is in the nature of a rambling voluntary network like the SSC, within a rambling global network like IUCN, to give too little attention to its human resource development. Perhaps it is in the nature of salaried organisations like governments, donor agencies and the IUCN Secretariat to give too little attention to the financial resource needs of a voluntary network like SSC. In any event, SSC has made only limited progress in building its capacity for its burgeoning task.

Overall, it is clear that SSC is effective in fulfilling its mandate of being the principal source of scientific advice on species survival and conservation to IUCN and its members, and of mobilising conservation action around the world. Although performance against objectives is hard to measure, there can be little doubt that the Commission is achieving many positive impacts with regard to these objectives, both within and beyond its immediate range of action and awareness. The ideal long-term consequence of SSC's work would be a halt to the current decline in biodiversity. That remains far from likely. The challenge far outstrips the resources of the Commission, or indeed of the entire conservation and development community. Many of SSC's initiatives, however appropriate and effective, need continued commitment and quality assurance over the coming years in order to reach their goals. ***As the number of other competent agencies and initiatives in the sector grows (section 9), the Commission must adjust its approach and activities to complement these other contributions.***

3. Rationale and relevance

3.1. Rationale

The rationale for the SSC's mandate and goals is sound (see box, section 2.2). Its commitment to the conservation of species threatened with extinction and of those important for human welfare is centrally important for the future of this planet's biosphere and of human life within it. Through a major strategic planning effort during 1999 and 2000, SSC has developed an enhanced and streamlined statement of vision, goal, objectives and targets that enhance its prospects of fulfilling its mandate and of maintaining its relevance.

There are long-standing debates within and outside IUCN about the roles and interrelationships of its Secretariat, members and Commissions; about the continuing relevance or effectiveness of Commissions as

generators and purveyors of knowledge; and about how best to divide the world of knowledge among a group of Commissions so that the Union can fulfil its mission (Bruszt and Turner, 2000). In particular, there is debate about how to link the social and natural sciences within and between Commissions. For example, should SSC develop so much social science capacity (primarily within the SUSG), when there are other Commissions with a more specifically social science mandate?

There are no firm answers in these debates. Given its character, such discussions are likely to be a permanent feature of the Union. There will therefore probably always be questions about the rationale of the SSC. The ongoing question of social science in the Commission has already been mentioned. Another is the growing uncertainty about the purpose and character of SGs based on taxa, and whether they can hope to cover all the biodiversity that the Commission needs to address. A third concerns the relationship between species and ecosystems, and whether the allocation of these two aspects to two separate Commissions makes best sense. It may not be helpful to expand the debate here, as no rationale or configuration for the SSC and the rest of the Union will ever be perfect. In the broader report on the Commission reviews being undertaken this year (section 1.1), we address some of these questions of rationale in more general terms.

3.2. Relevance to IUCN

A more pressing question is the relationship between SSC's goals and objectives and those of the IUCN as a whole. Both have recently been restated for the 2001-2004 triennium, in SSC's draft Strategic Plan and IUCN's draft Programme. There is little doubt that SSC is expected to be a major contributor to the implementation of the Union's new Programme. For the Commission's strategic planning exercise, a table of all the IUCN Programme's result areas and activities was produced showing how many times SSC (and the SUI) are mentioned as key role players.

In general terms, the SSC's Strategic Plan is relevant to the IUCN's Programme. Its successful implementation will help the Union achieve its goals for the triennium. In detail, however, much needs to be done to reconcile the two sets of targets and intended results. During the March 2000 SSC strategic planning session, participants assumed early on that this reconciliation would be a simple task. Towards the end of the session, they realised that it would be more complex and time consuming than they had thought. Ultimately, the session hardly addressed the issue at all, and handed it back to the lead consultant for further work. He pointed out that the exercise may necessitate the adjustment of some of SSC's objective and/or target statements, and the identification of IUCN result areas towards which the Commission will be unable to contribute. While both bodies' new plans are major advances on what has gone before, future synergy between the Union and its largest scientific resource base will require thorough work on the interface between the two. Since the March 2000 meeting, good progress has been made on the reconciliation of the SSC plan and the IUCN Programme, in a number of working sessions between the lead consultant and Secretariat staff.

Within IUCN, there is little doubt that the SSC is regarded as one of the Union's strongest components and one of the leading guarantors of its international credibility. As always in the Union, there are a range of complaints about poor communications between the Commission, the Secretariat and the membership, and a sense that SSC, as the largest and best-resourced Commission, may either take other parts of IUCN for granted or ignore them completely. These are long-standing structural and management issues within the Union as a whole, and not primarily a problem of SSC's making. Overall, SSC is so relevant to IUCN that IUCN could hardly survive without it.

3.3. Relevance to other stakeholders

Beyond these significant challenges of corporate responsibility for SSC within IUCN, there are more pressing issues of SSC relevance to the broader population of conservation stakeholders around the world. While most of these people clearly still support the work of the Commission, SSC certainly has no room for complacency in this regard. With its now 50 year old roots in a very different world of collegial relations between post-war (mostly white male) scientists, SSC clearly has an ongoing obligation to prove its relevance and competence for 21st century conservation endeavour. Not all qualified observers view SSC

science as being at the cutting edge. As already indicated, there are a growing number of sectors and initiatives in which the Commission should accept a constructive but minor role. Indeed, key advice from a leading southern African member of SSC is that IUCN generally does best in a supportive, rather than a proprietary, role.

4. Efficiency

4.1. Operational efficiency

There are two ways to address the questions of SSC 'efficiency' that are posed by the terms of reference for this review (Annex 1). The first, addressed in this section, concerns the structural or operational efficiency as a means of achieving specified objectives. The second, addressed in section 4.2, concerns the cost-effectiveness of SSC operations.

There are many ways in which an IUCN Commission is bound to be an inefficient means of achieving any set of objectives. It comprises volunteers who must almost all do the jobs they are paid for before they can give much thought to what the Commission wants them to do. In the SSC, as in other Commissions, these volunteers are only loosely associated. The SSC's organisation into SGs provides some additional structure and efficiency, but this advantage is countered by the enormous size of the Commission (some 7,000 members) and the large number of SGs (some 125).

The innate operational inefficiency of the SSC is highlighted when the Commission starts trying to operate like an executive organisation, adopting a programme with specified goals set out in a logical framework. Despite the worthy – indeed, necessary – motives for the adoption of an increasingly programmatic mode of operations by the SSC, the structural character of the network will be a major constraint on the efficient performance of programmatic functions. This is probably one reason why the SSC Chair does not think there should be more than a 75% overlap between what the SSC programme says and what the network actually does. He recognises that a rigid and total adherence to programme would be inappropriate and impractical for the SSC.

Indeed, from another point of view, the structural character of the SSC is highly efficient for achieving other purposes of the Commission that are not so clearly stated in the logical framework. These have to do with the mobilisation and synergy of thousands of scientists around the world who believe that voluntary efforts for SSC make a real contribution to conservation, and are therefore prepared to work hard for species survival with little or no material reward. By this reasoning, the loose character of the network, when linked to a high scientific reputation, delivers more to the global cause than a group of contracted staff could do for many times the current operational cost of SSC.

There are potentially dangerous tensions between these two views of SSC efficiency. As the Commission evolves towards a more centralised, programmatically managed mode of operations (which is partly necessitated by the increasing size of the network), there is a real risk that the rank and file of SSC members feel left out and lose enthusiasm. Already, SSC management faces a major challenge in achieving SG buy in to the strategic planning process. *SSC will have to work hard over the coming triennium to maintain and marshal the commitment of its membership while achieving reasonable levels of programmatic performance.*

4.2. Cost-effectiveness

At present, SSC is highly cost-effective. It is achieving more than could reasonably be expected, given its very slender financial means. This is only possible because of the voluntary contributions of its members and office bearers, and the financial contributions made by the employers of some of those office bearers (most notably the Chair). It is hard to imagine better ways for SSC to achieve the same results at less cost. Indeed,

many informants suggest that the Commission has already sunk below the lowest feasible resource level and is currently 'running on empty'. The time for which the quality, reputation and effectiveness of SSC operations can be maintained on this basis is strictly limited. ***Rather than being content or complacent about the current cost-effectiveness of SSC, IUCN and its supporters should instead give urgent attention to the financial viability of the Commission and the provision of at least that minimum adequate resource base for its expanding operations.***

5. Financial viability

5.1. Current financial status

There are several aspects to SSC funding. First, there is the funding allocated to the Species Programme at IUCN headquarters in Gland and at the SSC Cambridge office, covering the costs of the Secretariat support to the Commission. Secondly, there are general funds allocated by IUCN to Commission operations. Thirdly, funds are obtained from various donors for specific SSC projects, such as the Red List Programme and the Wildlife Trade Programme. In addition, many of the SGs have their own budgets – partly for central operations, partly for projects. Some of these groups, like the Conservation Breeding SG, dispose of substantial resources.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the current financial status of SSC is mixed. At the time of this review, the Gland Secretariat budget was in a healthier position than usual (although still in deficit). But some of the Commission's key projects – notably the Red List Programme and the SIS – still had substantial funding shortfalls, leading a key participant in the former project to describe the SSC as 'a beached whale'. There is wide variation among the SGs with regard to current finances. Because of the recent emphasis on fund raising for large grants to key SSC projects (section 5.3), operational grants to the smaller and poorer SGs have dwindled. This threatens the character and viability of parts of the network. As IUCN core funding decreases and SSC dependence on project funding increases, the Commission has less and less time and money to invest in SG network support.

5.2. Funding sources

As has been shown, the central budgets of IUCN, as administered by the Secretariat, provide only a fraction of SSC's total operating resources. While most of the funding for the IUCN programme now comes from international development agencies like SIDA and NORAD, these are not the lead supporters of SSC (apart from the SUI and SUSG, whose character is more in line with the purpose of this type of agency). The largest donors to SSC operations are the United Kingdom and United States Governments, the Taiwan Council of Agriculture, the World Wide Fund for Nature, Conservation International and the Centre for Marine Conservation.

Fund raising is a major task for IUCN Species Programme staff who support SSC from the Secretariat. Even though the process has been narrowed to a somewhat smaller number of larger grants than previously, a great many cost centres, projects and potential sources must still be manipulated. This led one of the Secretariat staff to write, in briefing papers for the March 2000 meeting of the SSC Executive Committee, that:

A larger question lies behind the budget situation. With considerable effort on the part of the staff, the deficits for 2000 can probably be covered. However, it is highly questionable that this is actually a good use of staff time. Discussions have been held with the Director General emphasising that the priority for the staff is to move the SSC programme ahead in line with the new strategic plan, not to devote all their time raising funds to allow the programme to stand still. It is undoubtedly a higher priority to secure funding for the SIS Central Service Unit than to seek funds to cover the deficit in the programme.

The Commission is considering the employment of professional fund raising capacity, which it has used in the past. But it was pointed out at the same meeting of the Executive Committee that such consultants are not necessarily the most effective fund raisers in fields like that of the SSC. ***The experienced, specialist staff and office bearers of the Commission should play the lead role in fund raising, with consultant staff doing background documentation and other support work.*** Unfortunately, an inevitable consequence of this investment of key people's time is a further reduction in the time they have available for network support.

5.3. Financial sustainability

While SSC appears to manage its resources responsibly and enjoys a measure of support from a range of funding agencies, its financial sustainability is not assured. Its challenge over the next triennium, as it works on a more focused strategic plan within a revitalised IUCN Programme, will be to demonstrate the continuing quality and effectiveness of its work and thereby to persuade donors that they should increase their allocations to it.

Some of SSC's lead projects, and many of its smaller SG operations, are far from financial sustainability at present. But erratic and uncertain funding scenarios are a natural part of life for organisations like IUCN and SSC. While the challenges just outlined will remain pressing, there are some more immediate budgetary considerations that the Commission will need to address. ***In particular, it will be necessary for SSC budgets and financial management to be restructured in line with the objectives and targets of the Strategic Plan rather than the different parts of the SSC structure, as has been done to date.*** How this will be achieved is not yet clear. ***In addition, the Commission will have to adopt a longer budget planning horizon than the one year that has been used so far. Meanwhile, as it addresses the new funding and budgetary challenges presented by the Strategic Plan, the Commission will have to give equal attention to the financial viability of its roots in the SGs – particularly those that do not have major projects or institutional homes in well resourced organisations.***

6. Strategy and leadership

6.1. Leadership

The evolution in SSC's leadership has partly reflected and partly driven the broader trends in the Commission's development. By all accounts the leadership of the former Chair was charismatic and committed, but relatively distant from the day to day detail and activities of the SSC. This sort of leadership was probably not inappropriate in the days of the looser network that the Commission then was. By contrast, the current Chair has (with the cooperation of his employers) immersed himself more in the detailed strategic management of SSC and has built a more centralised, programmatic direction for a network that has much more specific goals than it used to have. He has reinforced this approach by working with an Executive Committee that can meet more often and act more decisively than the statutory Steering Committee (section 7.1). This evolution in SSC leadership partly reflects the current Chair's own inclinations and abilities. Partly, as already suggested, it reflects the expanding trend in the Commission's view of its role as it addresses the perceived needs of species conservation. Partly, it reflects the Commission's view of the broader Union. Many would argue that IUCN was not strategically led and lacked programmatic direction during the second half of the last decade. Not surprisingly, many IUCN stakeholders outside the Secretariat felt a need to fill at least some of this strategic gap. While not everyone in SSC endorses the more centralised, structured and programme-driven management style of the current leadership, many have appreciated the way it enables the Commission to fulfil more of the roles that they feel the Union as a whole should be playing.

6.2. Strategic Plan

Various aspects and implications of SSC's latest strategic plan have already been discussed in earlier sections of this report, and will not be revisited here. The terms of reference for this review ask whether the Commission's Strategic Plan is aligned with the Union and whether it is used. We have already seen that aligning the new Plan with the Union and its new Programme is an outstanding item on SSC's agenda for the next few months. It is obviously too soon to say whether the Plan is used. It is not clear that the previous Plan was used much in directing the Commission's activities and strategic choices during the 1997-1999 triennium. The effort and commitment shown by SSC leadership in the development of the new Plan make it seem more likely that this one will be used – or at least, that the leadership will try to use it.

How successful the leadership will be will depend on how participatory and transparent the Plan was and will be in its preparation and implementation. These are two other concerns raised in the terms of reference and reflected by a number of those interviewed during this review. There has certainly been no effort to hide the planning process from the rank and file of Commission members and SGs. But it is widely felt that consultation and information delivery have not been fully effective with regard to the content and process of Plan development, or about the major SSC 'products', such as the SIS, on which so much effort has been expended in recent years. *SSC needs to do much more to bring the bulk of its membership on board with regard to the Plan and its products. Without this depth of participation, the prospects of achieving the Plan's goal and objectives are clearly jeopardised.*

7. Management

7.1. Management and planning

Not all the topics mentioned under this section of the TOR (Annex 1) appear directly connected to management issues, but we can start with those that are. In earlier decades, 'management' might not have seemed a very relevant issue to address in a review of an IUCN Commission. But, as has already been explained in this report, SSC is becoming a more and more managed organisation as it tries to evolve from a network of colleagues into a programme-focused achiever of planned objectives.

In these difficult transitional circumstances, while SSC still lacks most of the features and resources of a conventional programme-focused organisation, it is being managed at least as effectively as might be expected. Considering how little time and money they have for the task, SSC's leadership are making commendable progress in focusing the Commission's efforts on a specified set of objectives through the new Strategic Plan into which they have put so much effort over the last 12 months. This focusing of effort represents a substantive upgrade on the planning and management of the Strategic Plan for the previous triennium. It is noteworthy that the Chair's report for that triennium quotes the new Plan's vision, goal and objectives rather than those that applied to the reporting period; although in the early years of his chairmanship he put considerable effort into preparing the Commission to do more focused business. *SSC will have to intensify its management effort further, and deploy additional management resources, if the new Strategic Plan is to be effectively managed, implemented and monitored.*

While SSC leaders clearly show the necessary endorsement of and commitment to the Plan, the 'rank and file' of the Commission have not yet done so. Nor is there yet a clear sign that the required management resources will be available. SSC can therefore not yet guarantee that it will be able to meet the ambitious new management targets it has set itself with its new Strategic Plan. Indeed, it cannot yet say clearly how deeply its planning commits its membership. For whom, exactly, has it been planning? How far can it expect its members, or even the management of its SGs, to commit their voluntary resources or funded programmes to the objectives of the Commission's Plan? When annual work plans are drawn up in terms of the triennial Strategic Plan, whose work are they meant to guide? Conversely, how much is the work of Species

Programme staff in the Gland Secretariat meant to be determined by the Commission's triennial and annual planning? As yet, there are few clear answers to these questions of management and governance.

An important part of the SSC's management and planning functions falls to the staff of the Species Programme in the Secretariat. While these staff serve the leadership of the Commission, they provide a substantial part of the information, planning and fund-raising effort that SSC needs. As the SSC Chair points out, the active IUCN Commissions are those that have an active link to Secretariat staff. SSC is one of those in that fortunate position – additionally fortunate in that the Secretariat staff with which it works are highly capable and hard working, and that the personal relations between them and Commission leaders are good.

As noted above, the management of SSC clearly links to its governance. The TOR for this review ask no questions about governance, but this may be the place to note some of the trends and issues in this regard. There are two key strata of SSC governance: that of the Commission as a whole, and that of the SGs.

In accordance with the Statutes and their Regulations, SSC has a Steering Committee. This body has some 40 members, who are broadly representative of IUCN Regions and of the Commission's scientific concerns. However, it has not proved very effective in the governance of the Commission, partly because of its size – and partly, some would say, because it was not adequately briefed, given clear terms of reference, or provided with clear operating guidelines. It has not met since March 1999 and will not meet again until the World Conservation Congress in October 2000. The SSC Executive Committee is much more active, meeting about twice a year and corresponding actively in between. This has only 15 members, selected by the Chair from Commission membership on the basis of the direct and representative contribution they can make to SSC planning and management. However, the Executive Committee does not have statutory status.

The Chair rightly wishes to bring a smaller, management-oriented body like this to the fore of the Commission's governance. He is likely to make a proposal to achieve this when he submits the names of a new Steering Committee to the Council for approval. ***This new Committee should ensure formal representation for SSC's major thematic SGs, such as SUSG and the Captive Breeding SG, and for leading SSC partners like Birdlife International.*** Although necessary and appropriate, this evolution in SSC governance will raise questions about regional representation. The resources that bring institutions and their leaders to the fore in SSC affairs are unevenly distributed around the world, and this sort of Steering Committee risks under-representing developing countries. In any event, some development of this nature is unavoidable if SSC is to take the programmatic course that it has set itself. It will also be necessary, as the Chair envisages, for members and sub-committees within the new body to be given specific constituencies and roles for areas of biodiversity, possibly areas of the world, and objectives within the Strategic Plan.

Chairs of SGs play a key role in SSC governance. Some of them are also active at the level of Commission governance. In the larger and more active SGs, which have their own staff and programmes and resemble NGOs in some respects, the Chairs become completely overloaded with management tasks. As volunteers, they must carry this load in addition to the full time employment that most of them have (section 8). As scientists, they must confront management, political and diplomatic challenges for which their professional work may not have equipped them. SG Chairs are in the forefront of IUCN's delicate task of combining scientific impartiality with environmental and social commitment. At the same time they must contribute both upwards and downwards in the governance of the Commission, linking up to the Steering and Executive Committees and down to the membership of their respective SGs. At present, SSC lacks the resources to support and guide them in these tasks. ***It should, in particular, find a more thorough way to orientate new Chairs after they are appointed.***

7.2. SSC and the 'state of the art'

Although this reviewer is not qualified to offer a personal judgement on the matter, the indications are that most SSC science is still widely considered to be 'state of the art'. As has already been pointed out, there is certainly no room for complacency on the world's increasingly crowded scientific stage. Difficulties in funding the SIS and the latest enhancements to the Red List programme show that funders do not take SSC's scientific excellence for granted. Overall, however, IUCN can remain confident that SSC is still one of its leading resources of scientific excellence.

7.3. SSC and the Union

Despite its importance to IUCN and its strong working links with its Secretariat staff in Gland, SSC does not have adequate ties with the rest of the Union. Like most concerned observers, the Commission has been greatly heartened by the draft IUCN Programme for the coming triennium. Having started on the process much earlier than the Secretariat in Gland, SSC had developed its own Strategic Plan for the triennium. As was pointed out in section 3.2 above, it now has to reconcile its programme with that of the Union as a whole. There are few links between SSC programmes and projects and those of other Commissions.

Although they may have been comparing apples and oranges, some observers have said that SSC has been in better operational shape than IUCN in recent years. It is certainly relatively well equipped to respond to the Union's Programme for 2001-2004. But SSC's increasing vigour and programmatic focus during these recent years of comparatively poor health in Gland raise deeper dilemmas for it and the Union as a whole. Largely through its SUSG, SSC now deploys an impressive range and depth of social science skill and commitment. In developing the current Strategic Plan, it explicitly decided that it wanted to be an organisation that makes a difference, and not just one that provides scientific information and advice. Some of its objectives therefore speak of advocacy, influence and capacity building. In other words, it is becoming easier to mistake it for a surrogate Union. Partly because of the poor communication that is human nature, but significantly because of impatience with the performance of other parts of IUCN, SSC has now expanded its ambitions to the extent that it may risk being mistaken for IUCN. This is not a healthy situation. Perfect constitutional clarity and an ideally logical allocation of roles are hardly likely in a body like IUCN. *But, as more hopeful signs of programmatic purpose emerge from the Union's Secretariat, both Gland and the SSC leadership need to consult more closely on how to build synergy and avoid duplication.* An immediate challenge that has already been noted (and is already being tackled) is the reconciliation of the SSC Strategic Plan and the Union's draft Programme.

7.4. Monitoring and evaluation

As was noted in section 2.1, SSC's monitoring and evaluation processes are not yet adequate to improve its performance. There does not appear to have been systematic M&E of the previous triennial Strategic Plan. The new Plan implies much greater M&E challenges, but it is not yet clear how these will be met. Returning to the subject just discussed in section 7.3 above, this is a clear opportunity for collaboration with the rest of IUCN. The Union's Monitoring and Evaluation Initiative ought to be able to provide support and guidance to a Commission that seeks to upgrade its performance in this area.

8. Voluntarism

8.1. The voluntarism of Commission members

To respond specifically to a question in the TOR for this review, the mission, mandate and history of SSC are certainly clear enough to motivate the voluntary spirit of its members to share their time and knowledge. The 1999 external review of IUCN commented on the issue of voluntarism in Commissions (see box), and recommended that members be compensated, at standardised global rates, whenever they perform specific tasks in support of a programme or project administered by the Secretariat. Not surprisingly, the Union has not yet accepted this challenging proposal, which is elaborated further in this year's overall review of four Commissions (Bruszt and Turner, 2000, 10). It would significantly alter the character of participation by Commission members in its work. A related issue that was not highlighted by the External Review concerns compensation to Commission members who perform specific tasks for programmes or projects of the Commissions themselves. For SSC, this is likely to be a more pressing possibility than that of members working on Secretariat activities.

Comments on voluntarism by the IUCN external review, 1999

The driving force behind the work and contributions of Commission volunteers is their personal and professional interest in their subjects. In exchange for very limited operating resources from the Union, the collective results of all these voluntary inputs are an invaluable asset for IUCN. However, voluntarism has its limitations. It cannot routinely supersede personal interest. When the programmes and projects of the Union require defined, systematic and timely inputs of scientific knowledge and skill, the voluntary system of the Commissions may fail to cope. This deficiency of the voluntary system is an obstacle to the full use of the Commissions' competence and capacity in the Union's work, especially at regional and country levels.

We therefore recommend that the Union establish a compensation system for Commission members.

This compensation should apply when a Commission member performs a specified task in support of a programme or project administered by the Secretariat. Standard compensation rates should apply to all members of the Commission, irrespective of nationality, place of work or profession.

IUCN, 1999, 31.

So far, however, the scientific and environmental attractions of volunteering to work as an SSC member outweigh the costs in the perception of thousands of leading scholars around the world. As one person put it during the current review, the 1999 external review's comments on voluntarism referred more to a problem some Commissions may have in getting people to volunteer. SSC, on the other hand, gets so much voluntary work done by its members that it has reached a stage where additional supporting resources are essential if the momentum of the Commission's work is to be maintained.

8.2. Volunteer Chairs

Where SSC certainly does have a problem with voluntarism is with the Chairs of its Specialist Groups. Many of these volunteers now find themselves managing extensive programmes and projects, with their own salaried staff. Some now feel that the burden of this sort of voluntarism has become impossibly heavy, and that something has to change. SSC has addressed this issue from time to time in the past without resolving to change anything. There is still a gut feeling among many of the Commission's leaders that making the post of SG Chair a paid position would alter the character of the Commission – and especially its reputation for scientific impartiality in emotive conservation issues – for the worse. Being the unpaid Chair of an SG when helping to resolve conflicts between civil servants and NGO staff over African elephants, for example, offers a useful sort of moral advantage.

This issue links to that of the character and role of SGs themselves. Should they remain networks of volunteers? Or should they metamorphose into NGOs with paid staff? Some respected NGOs in SSC's field were originally volunteer SSC SGs. A first step that may be appropriate for some current SGs (and was taken some time ago by the Captive Breeding SG) is to become a legal entity, so that the group can handle its own funds directly and later cross the bridge to paying staff or a Chair more easily.

In a sense, these are problems of success – or, at least, of ambition. Voluntarism would be less of a problem for SG Chairs if SSC was content with just being a network of scientists that provides information and advice. Now that it seeks to influence, guide and deliver in the conservation field, it must think afresh about the suitability of voluntarism at its various levels. The March 2000 meeting of the SSC Executive Committee agreed that the voluntarism issue should be explored by a small task force, supported by an expert adviser. This is a sensible way forward. *As the Committee suggested, the task force should submit its report to the meeting of the SSC Steering Committee to be held at Amman in October 2000.*

The issues that arise from the voluntarism of SG Chairs arise also with regard to the position of SSC Chair. Here too it is obvious that the post could be more than a full time job for a salaried individual. The current Chair was fortunate (as was the SSC) in that his employers allowed him to devote about 75% of his time to the Commission during his initial period in the post. That has now shrunk to more like 25%. Once again, the voluntary nature of the position accords the incumbent and the Commission certain advantages, and imposes some heavy personal and institutional costs. Once again, the current consensus is probably that the position should remain unpaid. This means that the holder's employer, which is probably an institution working in the

conservation sector, is likely to make a substantial contribution, in kind if not in cash, to the cause of the SSC. (The current Chair's employers also fund an administrative position for SSC in his office.) Such a relationship should reflect well on both parties. However, such expectations are likely to exclude individuals and institutions in many parts of the world where resources on this scale are less available. Again, there are no easy answers to this aspect of the voluntarism issue in SSC. ***The Commission should include the question of the voluntary SSC Chair in the work of its proposed task force.***

9. Context

9.1. The IUCN context

In many ways, the IUCN context has had less impact on SSC's life and work in recent years than might be expected. The reasons for this have been discussed earlier in this report. They include the poor communications between the different parts of the Union that are a general feature of IUCN; and the often poor esteem in which SSC has held the condition and performance of the IUCN Secretariat during the past triennium. Rather than challenge these perceived weaknesses, SSC has usually preferred to go its own way and to develop more and more of the capacity and activities that might more logically be expected to find homes elsewhere in the Union (section 7.3).

One important link that SSC has been able to maintain with the IUCN context is the Secretariat staff who play such a key role in the Commission's planning, funding and operational management (section 7.1). As the Union has started to regroup itself around the draft Programme for the next triennium, the SSC has complimented itself on the major contribution that 'its' staff in Gland have made to the preparation of the Programme. (At the same time, some have complained that the Commission's own work suffered while the Species Programme staff were diverted to work on drafting the Programme.)

In any event, the key challenge now is for SSC to respond positively to the major changes in the IUCN context that are embodied in the change of leadership and the newly focused character of the forthcoming Programme. ***The response can be supportive or questioning, but it should at all times be proactive and committed.*** During its March 2000 planning work, the Commission did not make a convincing start by deferring the question of how its Strategic Plan should be dovetailed with the new IUCN Programme. ***It will be important for SSC to display a more active and positive profile in this regard before and during the forthcoming World Conservation Congress.*** Planning work done since March 2000 suggests good progress in this regard.

9.2. The conservation sector

The members and leadership of SSC are well informed about trends in their operational context within the conservation and environmental sectors. The Commission does not always respond optimally to these trends, but that must be expected in the behaviour of such a large and various network. At least three kinds of potential response can be identified:

- in response to increased scientific knowledge and enhanced scientific and communications procedures around the world, SSC should upgrade its scientific services. In this sense, the Commission has proved to be responsive – notably with its revision of Red List criteria and its development of the Species Information Service. Neither of these initiatives is without its critics or competitors, and both have been much delayed by the chronic shortage of funds that afflicts SSC and the rest of IUCN. There is no room for complacency about the quality or delivery of SSC science, but for a network of its character and resources the Commission can be commended for its performance with this kind of response to changing context;

- in response to the increasing urgency and higher political profile of many of the species survival and trade issues with which it deals, SSC should take a more central role as an impartial arbiter backed up by scientific data and expertise of the highest quality. While diplomacy and political negotiations may not be the preferred way for SSC scientists to spend their time, the Commission's performance and reputation in this regard again indicate an appropriate response to the increasing politicisation of its global context;
- in response to the changing institutional context within which it works, and its growing realisation of the enormity of its scientific task, SSC should strengthen its collaborative stance as one partner among many. (It is already a long-standing collaborator with organisations like BirdLife International and TRAFFIC.) SSC is not going to play the leading role as repository of data or leader of conservation action for all species – although there may still be some sectors of biodiversity where a much stronger SSC role is needed because no strong alternative agencies are active in their conservation. While there are signs that this realisation is spreading among the Commission's leadership, ***SSC needs to give higher priority to the challenge of forming new working alliances over the coming triennium.*** SSC's Plants Programme has made good progress in this regard. Linked to this challenge is the notion – not universally endorsed - that SSC should take a more strategic approach to its interventions. Instead of adopting a blanket approach to threatened biodiversity, it should focus on key species, taxa or ecological 'hot spots' on which it can add most value – typically, in association with other sources of scientific expertise. If this argument is extended to a focus on selected habitats or ecosystems as the subjects most urgently needing SSC attention, one potential collaborator should, in theory, be its partner Commission on Ecosystem Management. CEM's suitability for such a role will be the subject of another part of this 2000 review of IUCN Commissions.

Annex 1. Terms of Reference

The consultant is required to undertake an external review of the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC), focusing on the criteria given below. However, since this is an end of term review, it is recognised that it will not be possible to go into depth on each of these points.

1. To what extent has the SSC achieved its objectives/fulfilled its mandate?

- What has happened as a result of the SSC's work?
- What are the unplanned effects of the SSC's work?
- What are the probable long-term consequences of the SSC's work?
- What lessons can be learned from the SSC's experience of the past three years?

2. Rationale/ Relevance (Is the SSC relevant to its stakeholders?)

- Are the SSC's mandate and goals based on a sound rationale?
- To what degree will the achievement of the SSC's goals contribute to the achievement of IUCN's mission and goals?
- Are the SSC's mandate and objectives still relevant?
- Do stakeholders inside and outside IUCN support the work of the SSC?

3. Efficiency (Does the work of the SSC provide good value (results) for the resources it utilises?)

- Has the SSC used its resources in a cost-effective way? (Resources = money, volunteers, staff)
- Are there better ways for the SSC to achieve the same results at less cost?
- Are there better vehicles than a Commission to achieve the same results?

4. Financial viability (Is the SSC financially viable for IUCN?)

- Is the SSC financially sustainable?
- Has the SSC been able to generate funds outside of IUCN?
- Does it manage its resources responsibly?

5. Strategic leadership (Is the SSC led in a strategic fashion?)

- To what extent has strategy and leadership affected the SSC's performance?
- Does the SSC have a strategic plan to guide its work? Is it participative? Transparent? Aligned with the Union? Is it used?

6. Management (Is the SSC well managed?)

- Is the SSC able to plan, implement, and monitor its programme and projects?
- Does the SSC projects and programmes represent the state of the art work in their areas of expertise?
- Are the programmes and projects linked to the Programme of the Union at global and regional level and to the work of other Commissions?
- How has the SSC planned, implemented and managed the human resources, finances and inter/intra institutional linkages available to it impacted the SSC's performance [sic]?
- How well equipped is the SSC to respond to the forward looking Quadrennial Programme of IUCN?
- Does the volunteer membership of the SSC represent the state of the art in global expertise in the field of the SSC?

- Are the SSC's monitoring and evaluation processes adequate to improve its performance?

7. SSC's voluntary spirit (How does the voluntary spirit of the SSC affect its membership and IUCN?)

- To what extent does the SSC have a clear mission/mandate and history that motivates the voluntary spirit of its members to share their time and knowledge?
- Does the work of the SSC drive / motivate IUCN to perform better.

8. Impact of the context on SSC (What is the impact of the changing context and stakeholders on the work of the SSC?)

- What impact has the IUCN context had on the performance of the SSC?
- How well has the SSC dealt with the changes in the IUCN context.
- What impact have any changes in the conservation world related directly to the content of the SSC had on the SSC performance?
- How well has the SSC responded to changes in their field of endeavor?
- What impact have any changes in the conservation / environment sector in general had on the SSC's performance?
- How well has the SSC responded to changes in the broader conservation world.
- What has been the impact of donors on the SSC?

In order to perform the external review, the consultant will take part in meetings of the SSC, to be held in White Oak, Florida, USA, on 20-24 March 2000. At these meetings, the consultant will gather information through interviews with leading SSC members, review of documentation, taking part in the overall discussions.

The consultant will prepare a report to be submitted to Nancy MacPherson at IUCN headquarters by 25 April 2000.

References

Brackett, D., 2000. *Species Survival Commission (SSC) triennial report, 1997-1999*. Ottawa: SSC.

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