

**IUCN WORLD CONSERVATION CONGRESS**  
**9–15 October 2025, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates**

## **Report of the IUCN Council**

**Action Requested:** The IUCN World Conservation Congress is invited to **CONSIDER** the report of the IUCN Council to Congress.

### **I. Introduction**

This report outlines the major activities and achievements of the IUCN Council from the close of the 2021 Congress until the 2025 Congress.

The IUCN Council is the principal governance body of IUCN between sessions of the World Conservation Congress. Following its election in 2021, Council has addressed many issues fulfilling the roles described in Article 37 of IUCN's Statutes under its "*responsibility for the oversight and general control of all the affairs of IUCN*":

- to set strategic direction and policy guidance for the work of the Union;
- to provide oversight and guidance on the performance of the components of the Union as a whole and of the Director General in particular, encouraging coherence among its component parts;
- to fulfil its fiduciary responsibilities to the Members of the Union and to render account to them on the achievement of the Union's objectives; and
- to support the Director General in communicating IUCN objectives and policy and the IUCN Programme to the world community.

The Council's statutory roles provide the structure of this report. While there have been many successes, Council faces ongoing challenges in these roles, challenges that must continue to be addressed by the incoming Council.

The IUCN Council is a voluntary body and its members receive no financial benefits for their extensive service. It carries out its work through three standing committees: the Governance and Constituency Committee (GCC), Finance and Audit Committee (FAC) and Programme and Policy Committee (PPC); the Bureau (10 members of Council including the President who chairs it); the President and Vice Presidents; and various task forces and working groups. [Annex 1](#) provides an overview of the activities of these bodies and [Annex 2](#) presents the list of Council members.

### **II. Setting strategic direction for the Union**

When reviewing achievements during the current term last May, all Council members without exception highlighted as number one the positive shift in the dynamic and culture within the Council, and between the Council, the Commissions and the Secretariat. While they did not all know each other prior to election in Marseille, Council members very rapidly became an effective team of highly engaged individuals, willing to address many complex and sometimes sensitive issues, and able to discuss their diverse views in a frank but respectful and constructive way and to take decisions that are in the best interest of IUCN as a whole.

Relations between Council, Commissions and the Secretariat have gained renewed strength following the appointment of Dr Grethel Aguilar as Director General in October 2023. Council members welcomed the deepened collaboration and reinforced emphasis on the value of IUCN for its Members.

Council agreed on a number of strategic objectives for the current term (listed below) and dedicated significant efforts to improving the strategic direction for the next term and beyond on the basis of the 20-year Strategic Vision, including a Financial Strategy, and the draft Programme and Financial Plan for the next quadrennium.

Council members note the growth of the Programme portfolio, implemented with increasing Member involvement, and that improved reporting has become a reality. Council members continue to highlight risks related to the growth of the project portfolio, and the reduced percentage of unrestricted income.

Council members welcome the significant increase of IUCN's presence and influence in Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and international advisory proceedings. A case in point was the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) Advisory Opinion on the obligations of States to protect the climate system which reflected all key elements of the written submission delivered by IUCN's World Commission on Environmental Law to the Court. Council members are also very pleased to see significant improvements in the collaboration between Council, Commissions and the Secretariat in the development, finalisation and promotion of IUCN positions and recommendations relevant to key MEA meetings.

Throughout every meeting, Council maintained a strong focus on delivering against five strategic objectives for the term 2021–2025 determined at its first meeting in 2022:

1. Strategic Vision: as requested by 2021 Congress Resolution 147, Council established the Intersessional Council Working Group (with Council members and Members) which developed, with input from IUCN Members at various stages in the process, a 20-year Strategic Vision for IUCN including a financial strategy to achieve the strategic vision and IUCN's mission and submitted it to the 2025 Congress for adoption.

In line with the Strategic Vision, the Draft Programme 2026–2029 proposed by Council to Congress will measure the Union-wide delivery of conservation outcomes and impact of *Nature 2030* and is transformative in its conservation actions. It was developed by a joint Council-Secretariat Working Group with more IUCN Member input than ever before – online and during the Regional Conservation Forums.

2. Governance Reforms: Council completed the implementation of the Council Response to the 2019 External Review of IUCN Governance and committed to continuously throughout the term monitor and engage with key governance issues such as strategic thinking, risk management, performance management, employee engagement, annual membership survey, membership models, amending Statutes, healthy and sustainable finances, and streamlining Member committees. Resulting from this, Council is proposing to the 2025 Congress to amend the Statutes to improve the effectiveness of IUCN's governance, adapting IUCN's objectives in line with the proposed IUCN 20-year Strategic Vision, strengthening the alignment of Statutes with Swiss law, clarifying the nomination and election procedures including establishing an appeals process against decisions of the Election Officer that reject proposals or nominations for any of the elected positions. (MOTION C)
3. Resolutions: Council paid priority attention to a dozen Resolutions of the 2021 Congress requiring action from the Council. In particular, Council:
  - ✓ Appointed the Interim Chair and members of the Interim Steering Committee of the Climate Crisis Commission as requested by Resolution 110, approved the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Commission and the annual work plans, and encouraged the Chair and Steering Committee to recruit Commission members. To all intents and purposes, the Commission operated as the other Commissions, including a voting right in Council for the Interim Chair, pending the result of the 2025 Congress consideration of a Council motion to confirm the status of the Commission and approve its mandate. (MOTION 121)
  - ✓ Based on the thorough work undertaken by the Advisory Group established pursuant to Congress Decision 148, proposed to IUCN Members, a set of proposals to reform the Statutes, Rules of Procedure of the Congress and Regulations making the Congress

henceforth a fully hybrid event with the aim to increase Member involvement in Congress. IUCN Members subsequently adopted them by intersessional electronic vote in December 2023.

- ✓ Submitted to the 2025 Congress a set of amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Congress to increase the effectiveness and transparency of the motions process as requested by Members during the 2021 Congress (recorded in the Congress Proceedings). (MOTIONS A and B)
- ✓ Approved the process for implementation of 2021 Congress Resolution 123 on the development of an IUCN Policy on synthetic biology in relation to nature conservation and the ToR of the bodies involved in the process such as the Policy Development Working Group and the Citizens' Assembly. Council also approved the draft Policy resulting from this process for submission to the 2025 Congress. (MOTION 87)
- ✓ Approved an *Action Plan for the Implementation of Congress Decision 145* to support the work of the National, Regional and Interregional Committees and made consequential changes to the *Operational Guide for National, Regional and Interregional Committees*.
- ✓ Established a Task Force to deliver on 2021 Congress Resolution 107 Reducing the impact of fisheries on marine biodiversity, which will report on its outstanding progress to the 2025 Congress.
- ✓ Established a Task Force (with Council, Commission and Member representatives) on Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, which produced an IUCN Strategy, Policy and Programme on Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, which Council endorsed and will be presented at the 2025 Congress.

In addition to the motions already referred to, the Council submitted the following motions to the 2025 Congress:

- ✓ Harnessing IUCN's power: Driving synergy for a net zero, nature positive and just energy transition (MOTION 38)
  - ✓ Developing a policy on geoengineering (MOTION 41)
  - ✓ Integrating biodiversity conservation in carbon pricing and trading programmes for climate change mitigation (MOTION 43)
  - ✓ Defining a robust Nature Positive for Business framework, to mobilise corporate, civil society and government support for high-integrity nature positive contributions aligned with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (MOTION 73)
  - ✓ Archiving Resolutions and Recommendations and making IUCN policy more accessible. (MOTION 120 – submitted to the online vote on motions)
4. Membership Value Proposition: with the assistance of an external consultant commissioned by Council, in-depth interviews followed by more than 170 responses to an online survey and polls with more than 640 Members at Regional Conservation Forums provided an interesting set of insights about the value of benefits of IUCN membership - with particular attention to engagement of IUCN Members as part of the *One Programme* approach - and possible strategies to address the gap between the cost of membership services and the income from membership dues. These insights will constitute valuable input to the review of the membership model identified in the 20-year Strategic Vision as one of the core areas for strengthening IUCN's governance. In the meantime, Council welcomed progress on extra efforts to increase and maintain State membership and the deeper and broader engagement of Subnational Government Members.
5. International Positioning: with the leadership and assistance of its Programme and Policy Committee (PPC), Council engaged at each biannual meeting in a dialogue with the Secretariat to identify international, intergovernmental policy priorities and areas where IUCN can have a maximum impact, and the expertise, networks, collaborations and influence of IUCN's constituent parts and new partners were effectively leveraged. For this purpose, PPC's policy oversight procedures were updated, and the learning will culminate in an IUCN intergovernmental policy

strategy within the framework of the 20-year Strategic Vision and the IUCN Programme 2026–2029.

### III. Providing oversight and guidance on performance

Council has been increasingly confident about the strengthened management and oversight of IUCN's finances, the growing reserves and improved risk management as the corollary of a growing Programme portfolio, thanks to the continuous focus of the Finance and Audit Committee, the Treasurer and the Director General on key areas called the "big 5" which formed the basis of an initial set of financial key performance indicators in the 2026–2029 Financial Plan: (1) increasing unrestricted income, (2) building reserves, (3) de-risking the portfolio, (4) increasing cost recovery, and (5) controlling costs and investments. Key findings from the Council-commissioned Finance Review and Financial Governance Review were implemented and integrated into the annual budgets, the DG's strategic objectives, the Financial Plan 2026–2029 and the Financial Strategy as part of the 20-year Strategic Vision.

The Council is pleased with the results of 2024 which ended with a surplus of CHF 6.3m, reflecting strong project implementation from a growing portfolio together with improved cost recovery. This allowed the unrestricted reserves to increase to CHF 26.8m against a target of CHF 25m as per the Financial Plan 2025 approved by an IUCN Members' intersessional e-vote in 2024 (as an extension of the Financial Plan 2021–2024). Council notes that more work needs to continue on de-risking the growing portfolio and the increasing role of IUCN as an implementing entity.

Council reviewed the Director General's annual written report to Council on achievements against strategic objectives. In addition, the Council approved the annual audited financial statements for the years 2021 through 2024 following review of the external auditors' reports which have all been "unqualified" (i.e. they give a true and fair view of the consolidated financial position of IUCN and meet the requirements of Swiss Law).

Council approved the work plans of the seven IUCN Commissions and discussed their annual reports to Council.

The Congress Preparatory Committee (CPC) has been overseeing preparations for the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi, among them: the Congress themes and agenda, selection of Forum events, implementation of key provisions of the Host Country Agreement, Congress budget, registration fees, risk management, Members' Assembly agenda, invitations to observers, and communications. In addition, the CPC acted as the appeal body for the motions process and ruled on 41 appeals.

The Council's Programme and Policy Committee (PPC) assisted Council with oversight of the implementation of the IUCN Programme 2021-25 and IUCN policies, and initiated work to fill gaps in policy and strategies leading to Council's approval of, among others:

- ✓ a *Strategy for Knowledge Products and Knowledge Management* and a *Strategy and Business Plan for the IUCN Academy*;
- ✓ an updated set of *Criteria and Indicators for the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions*;
- ✓ a *draft IUCN Council Private Sector Engagement Strategy*, with a recommendation to the next Council 2026–2029 that it consider establishing a Council Working Group on Private Sector Engagement with a mandate to consult with Members and Commission members on the draft and, taking their comments into account, continue the development of an IUCN-wide Private Sector Engagement Strategy to help guide the implementation of relevant elements of the IUCN Programme 2026–2029, and that it continue discussion and consultation on possible private sector membership of IUCN;
- ✓ the *IUCN Strategy, Policy and Programme on Antarctica and the Southern Ocean*; and
- ✓ the *IUCN Operational Framework for Engagement with the Oil and Gas Sector*, applicable to assessing all proposed engagements with the oil and gas sector by the Secretariat and

Commissions and approved a mechanism for oversight of the application of the Framework with the involvement of PPC's Private Sector Task Force.

Council members noted the growing complexity of IUCN rules and structures, requiring more legal expertise, but also requiring Council members to invest extra volunteer time for new but necessary initiatives such as the review of IUCN policies and rules, e.g. in the field of finance.

#### **IV. Fulfilling fiduciary responsibilities to the Members of the Union**

In October 2023, after a comprehensive and thorough international search process, the IUCN Council appointed Dr Grethel Aguilar as the new Director General following the resignation of Dr Bruno Oberle who left IUCN at the end of June 2023. Dr Aguilar was Acting Director General in the period July-October 2023.

The Council reviewed and approved the annual work plans and budgets for the years 2022 to 2025 and the annual reports for the years 2021 to 2024.

Following a thorough due diligence undertaken by its Governance and Constituency Committee (GCC) and consultation with all IUCN Members – to date (17 September 2025) – Council has admitted 287 new IUCN Members, approved 31 requests for membership category change and recognised the Interregional Committee for Europe, North and Central Asia, the Regional Committee of North Africa and the National Committees of IUCN in Libya, Egypt and Albania.

Fulfilling the mandate, it was given by 2021 Congress Decision 152 (approved by IUCN Members' electronic vote in February 2021), Council developed a proposal which was subsequently approved by an IUCN Members' electronic vote in December 2023 modifying the membership dues for venue-based organisations by taking into account their expenditures on conservation activities instead of their total expenditures. Council also addressed the challenges faced by a number of IUCN Members regarding the increase in membership dues following the implementation of the IUCN Membership Dues Guide adopted in 2021.

Further, based on the mandate it was given by Congress Decision 152 to continue work on the issue of *"Members facing difficult financial situations and not being able to pay their dues"*, Council developed a dues waiver mechanism and submitted it to the 2025 Congress for discussion and vote. (MOTION D) Council also established a Fund to assist small Indigenous Peoples' Organisations with payment of their membership dues.

In accordance with the Statutes and Regulations, the Council appointed Mr Norbert Berlocher, Switzerland, as Councillor from the State in which IUCN has its seat; Mr Ramiro Batzin Chojoj as additional appointed Councillor; Ms Sandrine Friedli Cela as Legal Adviser; and the Deputy Chairs and Steering Committee members of the seven IUCN Commissions on the proposal of their respective Chairs.

Following a thorough selection process and taking into account the proposal from the Candidate Host, the evaluation report, and the recommendations from the Secretariat as well as all other relevant facts, Council was pleased to accept the offer from the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi to host the 2025 IUCN World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, from 9 to 15 October 2025.

In preparation for the 2025 Congress, Council also:

- ✓ established the Congress Preparatory Committee (cf. section III above);
- ✓ established the Motions Working Group to manage the motions process prior to Congress;
- ✓ appointed the Election Officer and Deputy Election Officer to validate the proposals and nominations that meet the requirements of the Statutes and Regulations;
- ✓ approved the *Qualities required for the positions of President, Treasurer, Chairs of Commissions, Councillors elected from the Regions and Indigenous Councillor* and Guidance for election candidates ahead of the opening of the nominations process;

- ✓ established the Nominations Committee to recommend to Council candidates for President, Treasurer and Commission Chairs;
- ✓ nominated the candidates for President, Treasurer and the Chairs of the seven IUCN Commissions based on the proposals made by IUCN Members and members of the Commissions;
- ✓ approved the ToR for the Congress Committees; and
- ✓ approved the draft mandates for the seven Commissions.

Council made use of its authority to amend the Regulations on four occasions following consultation of IUCN Members as required by the Statutes:

- Regulation 94 to shorten the length of the process for intersessional electronic votes by IUCN Members and to institutionalise intersessional e-votes;
- Regulations 72 and 75 reforming the Commission membership renewal process;
- Regulation 85 to allow Council to request external legal advice (under consideration for approval in second reading); and
- Regulation 39 regarding nominations of candidates with multiple nationalities (deferring approval in second reading to the next Council).

Finally, Council approved the appointment of Ms Anna Zeichner as Secretary to Council in conformity with Regulation 56*bis*, effective 1 December 2025, to replace Luc De Wever who will retire from IUCN at the end of 2025.

## **Composition, structure and meetings of the IUCN Council 2021–2025**

The IUCN Council comprises the President, the Treasurer, the Councillor from the State in which IUCN has its seat (Switzerland), twenty-eight Regional Councillors, the Chairs of IUCN's seven Commissions, the additional appointed Councillor and the Director General (without vote). See hereafter [Annex 2](#) for the complete list.

All members of the IUCN Council were elected by the 2021 Congress with the exception of the Councillor from the State in which IUCN has its seat, the additional appointed Councillor, and the Interim Chair of the Climate Crisis Commission.

By the time of the 2025 Congress, the IUCN Council will have held 17 meetings, including 10 (six-monthly) ordinary meetings numbered from C106 to C115 held in person except C114 (note that some meetings were held in two parts: a virtual meeting followed by the in-person meeting a few weeks later) and two extraordinary meetings held virtually in September 2022 and April 2023.

The Council's first biannual meeting of the year was held at the IUCN Conservation Centre in Gland, Switzerland, and the second meeting in the regions: C108 in Abu Dhabi, UAE in January 2023 hosted by the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund; C110 in Fontainebleau, France in November 2023 hosted by the French Government at the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of IUCN's foundation; and C112 in Antigua, Guatemala in January 2025 hosted by the IUCN Members from Guatemala.

The Bureau established by the IUCN Council is comprised of the President, Treasurer, two Vice-Presidents, a Commission Chair representing the Chairs of the IUCN Commissions, two Councillors elected from the Regions, the Chairs of the three standing committees of the Council (the Finance and Audit Committee, Governance and Constituency Committee, and Programme and Policy Committee) and the Director General (without vote). The Bureau held 14 virtual meetings number B1 to B14 with the exception of four meetings (B4, B5, B8 and B9) held in person on the occasion of a Council meeting held in-person.

In accordance with its [Transparency Policy](#) adopted in 2016, [all decisions of the Council and the Bureau](#) adopted during meetings (held in-person or virtually) as well as all [decisions of Council and Bureau approved by email correspondence between meetings](#) of the Council have been published on IUCN's public website in the three official languages of IUCN (English, French and Spanish). Also the documents prepared for Council and Bureau meetings (original language version only) as well as the summary minutes (in the three official languages) of these meetings have been posted on [IUCN's public website](#).

Four Vice-Presidents support the President with advice and assistance in the management of Council meetings and serve as the Council's Ethics Committee. Together with the President, they constitute the Evaluation Committee of the Director General. (Article 48 (c) of the Regulations)

Every Council member serves on one of the three standing committees of the Council. In addition, the Council established also the following temporary bodies: the Congress Preparatory Committee, the Motions Working Group, the Nominations Committee, the Search Committee for the Director General, the Council Working Group on Membership Dues, the Programme Development Working Group, the Intersessional Council Working Group for the IUCN 20-year Strategic Vision and the Task Force on Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. The Council appointed Ms Lolita Gibbons as Council's Global Oceans Focal Person and Ms Shaikha Salem Al Dhaheri as Council's representative in the Global Group for National and Regional Committee Development.

The standing committees established task forces to accomplish specific and time bound tasks, such as the PPC's Task Forces on Private Sector, Retirement of Resolutions, Conservation and Human Rights; the GCC's Task Forces on Statutory Reform, Improvement to the Motions Process and Membership Value Proposition; and the FAC's Contingency Plan Task Force. Except for the in-person meetings held at the occasion of in-person meetings of the Council, the standing committees and their task forces accomplished their work through virtual meetings or email correspondence.

In addition to their involvement in Council and related meetings, the Council members contributed significant time playing active roles in global, regional and national events including National, Regional and Interregional Committees and Regional Conservation Forums, or as part of IUCN delegations to multilateral meetings, or as part of other delegations to multilateral meetings, or providing support to the President and Director General during visits to their country/region. Following a decision of the IUCN Council adopted in 2018, a small amount has been reserved in the annual IUCN Budget supporting Councillors' attendance to meetings of National, Regional and Interregional Committees and other important events in their region.





## ***IUCN COUNCIL 2021-2025***

### **PRESIDENT**

Ms Razan Al Mubarak, UAE

### **TREASURER**

Mr Nihal Welikala, Sri Lanka and UK

### **COMMISSION CHAIRS**

#### Commission on Ecosystem Management

Ms Angela Andrade, Colombia

#### Commission on Education and Communication

Mr Sean Southey, Canada/South Africa

#### Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy

Ms Kristen Walker Painemilla, USA

#### Species Survival Commission

Mr Jon Paul Rodriguez, Venezuela

#### World Commission on Environmental Law

Ms Christina Voigt, Germany

#### World Commission on Protected Areas

Ms Madhu Rao, India/United Kingdom

#### Climate Crisis Commission

Mr Manuel Pulgar Vidal, Peru<sup>1</sup>

### **COUNCILLORS ELECTED FROM THE REGIONS**

#### Africa

Mr Brian Child, Zimbabwe  
Mr Ali Kaka, Kenya  
Ms Imèn Meliane, Tunisia  
Ms Gloria Ujor, Nigeria

#### Meso and South America

Mr Marco Vinicio Cerezo Blandon, Guatemala  
Ms Ana Di Pangraccio, Argentina  
Mr Ramon Perezgil Salcido, Mexico  
Ms Bibiana Sucre, Venezuela

#### North America and the Caribbean

Mr Rick Bates, Canada  
Mr Sixto J. Inchaustegui, Dominican Republic  
Ms Susan Lieberman, USA

#### South and East Asia

Mr Kazuaki Hoshino, Japan  
Mr Ma Keping, China  
Mr Vivek Menon, India  
Ms Hasna Jasimuddin Moudud, Bangladesh  
Mr Jong Soo Yoon, Republic of Korea

#### West Asia

Ms Shaikha Salem Al Dhaheri, UAE  
Mr Said Ahmad Damhoureyeh, Jordan  
Mr Ayman Rabi, Palestine

#### Oceania

Mr Peter Michael Cochrane, Australia  
Ms Lolita K. Gibbons, Palau  
Ms Catherine Iorns, New Zealand

#### East Europe, North and Central Asia

Mr Carl Amirgulashvili, Georgia  
Mr Vilmos Kiszal, Hungary  
Mr Samad-John Smaranda, Romania

#### West Europe

Ms Sonia Castañeda Rial, Spain  
Ms Hilde Eggermont, Belgium  
Ms Maud Lelievre, France

### **COUNCILLOR FROM THE STATE IN WHICH IUCN HAS ITS SEAT**

Mr Norbert Baerlocher, Switzerland<sup>2</sup>

### **APPOINTED COUNCILLOR**

Mr Francisco Ramiro Batzin Choj, Guatemala<sup>2</sup>

### **DIRECTOR GENERAL (non-voting)**

Ms Gretel Aguilar, Costa Rica

<sup>1</sup> Appointed by Council C107, May 2022

<sup>2</sup> Appointed by Council C106, September 2021