

# A New Role for National Committees?

National Committees are free associations of IUCN members which have developed spontaneously in several countries. They are not specifically recognized by the Union's Statutes and their success and activities vary greatly due to different circumstances. National Committees, like those of the United Kingdom or Australia, have gained prestige because of their good faith efforts. Others have not.

The time has come for the Union to consider incorporating the existing and future National Committees in a more structured way as part of the IUCN constituency.

This is a fundamental step for the Union's future development because, if done properly, they may fill an important gap in the decision-making process. IUCN may be: (1) an organization driven by principles (conservation principles) based on a technocratic structure, (2) membership driven as a democratic body, or (3) money-driven as pragmatically provoked by the pulse of donors. Perhaps today the Union is excessively money-driven and should aim towards a more balanced organizational mix of forces; "principles oriented and membership driven", as stated in the draft Strategic Plan, which will be presented at the 19th General Assembly in Buenos Aires.

At present, it is very difficult for the members to influence the policy of the Union. The General Assembly is prob-

ably the only possibility, but it has become a very complicated procedure with many issues concluded in advance. The way in which a member's new idea has to struggle through the Secretariat to arrive at general consideration is cumbersome, if not discouraging.

By embedding the National Committees in the Union's structure as a step between the members and the Council, one could fill an existing vital gap in the Union's policy making procedure. Thus, policy procedures would not pass through the Secretariat - which should act more as the Union's executive body - and would link the members on a more formal way directly with the Council, a policy organ of IUCN which at present is not fulfilling its mission due to lack of interactions with its members. Regional Councillors should listen to and promote the ideas and priorities of their regions as expressed by the National Committees or in regional meetings; in the Council they should act as the voice of their region, not just in their



personal capacity with their region being a mere sociogeographical background.

On the other hand, the new link with the National Committees would give the Regional Councillors an opportunity to know first hand how the work of IUCN is taking place on the ground; at present, the Secretariat is the only source of information regarding its own performance as executive body.

National Committees themselves may wish to develop several activities in favour of IUCN's Mission through their members or in connection with the Secretariat or the Union's Commissions. But the role proposed here is a new function of free acceptance that would vitalize the whole democratic mechanism of IUCN. In addition, a change is needed in the election procedures for Regional Councillors, who should be elected within their own region.

As a Regional Councillor, I would be pleased to be prodded by the National Committee in my region to adequately lobby their ideas and points of view. This would give greater sense to my elected position.

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## European members unite

The first ever IUCN European members meeting took place on 10 November in the Dutch city of Maastricht. Some 70 individuals took part in the discussions, including the Director General, four Regional Councillors and staff from the Secretariat. Presentations were given on a range of topics including the status of the European region, the role of voluntary networks and Commissions, and IUCN's European Programme. Eight candidate Regional Councillors took this opportunity to introduce themselves.

Touching on one of the key issues to be discussed at the upcoming General Assembly (see page 2), the Director General posed the question as to what extent the members wish to be in the driving seat of IUCN. Depending upon decisions taken, this could increase links between northern and southern members, as well as links with the Commissions; strengthen links with the Secretariat; and construct a global view on European issues. Overall support was voiced for holding Regional Fora and constructing a Regional Advisory Council. However, no consensus was reached on the future role of the European Programme except that IUCN should not have on-the-ground activities in western Europe, but leave these to its members, and should continue its work in eastern Europe. On a pan-European scale, it was agreed that IUCN should collate members' regional views on global issues. A full report of the meeting will be circulated to all European members.

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