

Proposal for the establishment of an IUCN SSC Post-2020 Biodiversity Targets Task Force

Introduction

The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) is a global network of more than 8,000 scientific experts, working together to achieve “A just world that values and conserves nature through positive action to reduce the loss of diversity of life on earth.” The SSC includes over 130 Specialist Groups, Task Forces and Stand-alone Red List Authorities, organized taxonomically, regionally, or by discipline. This proposal sets out the relevant information for the formation of a new IUCN SSC Task Force aimed at collating inputs and views from the SSC, and providing scientific and technical expertise on species related target(s) within the framework of the post-2020 Strategic Plan for Biodiversity to the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), through coordination with IUCN Secretariat. It will do this whilst co-ordinating with other organisations working towards the post 2020 agenda and the Task Force will fill a clear (and agreed) need for focus and leadership on species issues.

The adoption of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011 – 2020 in 2010 at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP10) under the CBD, including its Strategic Goals and Aichi Targets, represented a major step forward for biodiversity conservation to support life on earth. The Aichi Targets set objectives to be achieved by the year 2020.

SSC wishes to assist Parties to the CBD to consider what species conservation related goals could be considered beyond 2020. The SSC disbanded its Policy Sub-Committee in 2016 with a view to better focus and manage policy work by establishing Task Forces to work on specific issues.

Rationale

1. What are the key conservation issues facing the taxon or group?

The adoption of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011 – 2020 in 2010 at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP10) under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), including its Strategic Goals and Aichi Targets, represented a major step forward for biodiversity conservation to support life on earth. The Aichi Targets set objectives to be achieved by the year 2020. One of these targets is concerned specifically with the conservation status of species: Target 12 states:

By 2020, the extinction of known threatened species has been prevented and their conservation status, particularly of those most in decline, has been improved and sustained.

Progress towards this target has been a cause for concern for some time, and it is considered that it is a target that requires considerable attention. *Global Biodiversity Outlook 4* (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity 2014) breaks the 20 targets down into 55 components and ‘the conservation status of those species most in decline has been improved and sustained’ component of Target 12 is one of only five (of 55) where ‘things are getting worse rather than better’.

This target also contributes to target 15.5 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and, therefore, it is expected that whatever is agreed by CBD Parties will inform this target as it is updated in 2020 to come into line with the 2030 deadline for most other SDG targets. This gives added importance to ensuring that there is a strong vision for species post-2020.

2. Why is this taxonomic level and / or geographic scope considered to be the most appropriate level at which to address these conservation issues?

The CBD's current strategic plan (including its Aichi Targets) will be reported on in 2020, making the time between now and then highly important. At the same time, attention is shifting towards what will follow the current Strategic Plan. The development of a Task Force, to work towards the 15th CBD CoP in 2020 would allow species expertise from across SSC to promote the strong positioning of species in the post-2020 agenda, based on the best science and diverse talents of the Commission's members. At present there is no mechanism to channel appropriate SSC expertise and knowledge into this debate, although SSC is represented very strongly on some issues, such as invasive species, through the Invasive Species Specialist Group. Furthermore, there is no clear leadership from the broader conservation community to ensure that species have a strong voice in the post-2020 discussion.

This Task Force would, therefore, provide time-limited leadership and focus for SSC to inform CBD's post-2020 agenda for global species conservation. In anticipation of the Task Force becoming established, Philip McGowan (see below) has been invited to join the World Commission on Protected Areas Beyond 2020 Task Force and a researcher working with him (Louise Mair) attended their first scoping workshop in summer 2017 and is involved in follow up work. Contact with that group is, therefore, established and communications will be increased if and when the Task Force is formally established. Louise Mair also attended a cross IUCN meeting in August 2017, and will be engaged on Target 12 research (see under 7 below) until mid-2020 at least.

3. Is there a clear gap for the group to fill, and a value-added benefit that the formation of the group would deliver, rather than duplicate efforts of existing Specialist Groups or IUCN partner institutions?

Discussions held with the CBD Secretariat, starting with the then Executive Director (Braulio Dias) in 2015, when Philip McGowan was Co-Chair of the SSC Policy Subcommittee have made clear that greater involvement by SSC would be welcomed. The Task Force would work in collaboration with the IUCN Secretariat to ensure complementarity of efforts and coherence of positions.

Since summer 2017, it has become clear that whilst there is a considerable amount of activity emerging as a range of organisations are developing workplans directed at 2020, there is a clear lack of focus on all species and, specifically the provision of science to informed policy discussions. There is a CBD co-ordination group (led by the RSPB in the UK) that involves international organisations working towards the CBD Agenda, such as BirdLife International, UN Environment-WCMC, Conservation International, Zoological Society of London, Kew Gardens, Pew Charitable Trusts etc, as well as IUCN. It has met physically (in London, UK) twice, with dial-in participation from international partners and the CBD Secretariat. Philip McGowan has taken part in these meetings, at the invitation of the SSC Chair. These meetings have both shown the value of strong SSC engagement to promote science-led species positions, and permit wider co-ordination with others focussing on 2020.

4. What are the key activities / outputs that the group would undertake / deliver to better understand and address these issues, and how will these activities / outputs contribute to the SSC Strategic Plan?

The aim of the SSC Post-2020 Biodiversity Targets Task Force is to increase the input of scientific information on species from SSC into global discussions on the post-2020 biodiversity agenda. To do this it will seek to:

- a) determine the views of members of the SSC on the species conservation planning targets beyond 2020, and their views on potential advice that can be provided to help with implementation of work towards any future species conservation targets. This will allow the Task Force to identify key issues for species in the post-2020 agenda;

- b) work in collaboration with the IUCN Secretariat to provide scientific and technical guidance to Parties on species conservation planning and implementation;
- c) ensure that, in 2020, any new or revised conservation targets relating to species under the CBD and associated Protocols and Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) are ambitious while achievable, practical and helpful in terms of implementation of the overall goals of the CBD. These goals are the conservation, and sustainable use, of biodiversity, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of use of genetic resources; and
- d) Develop a road map of engagement so that the Task Force, working with IUCN Secretariat, will be ready for the major CBD milestones over the next three years.
- e) Working with the IUCN Secretariat to support the development of a short policy position paper framing and outlining what is needed for species conservation for the next decade, within the framework of the CBD and other MEAs /mechanism of biodiversity/living in harmony with nature (2021-2030); what will Target 12 look like post 2020?;
- f) Position the Assessment-Plan-Action approach for species conservation: for example, by ensuring the IUCN Red List informs and feeds into the CBD post-2020 process, as well as a mechanism for measuring conservation actions at the national level (i.e., hold CBD Parties accountable for reporting).

The Task Force will seek to consult and build advice about species conservation targets from members of the SSC and other IUCN Commissions as follows:

- A framing workshop will be held shortly after the establishment of the Task Force in 2017, to set its scope of work and agree its work plan, including plans for fundraising and to indicate institutional support for activities. The timing and location of the workshop will be subject to funding.
- Within its agreed scope of work, the Task Force will conduct a comprehensive review of available scientific and policy literature, to understand the context of species conservation target setting in relation to Aichi Target 12, and also related Aichi Targets such as Target 6 (sustainable use), Target 9 (alien invasive species), and Target 13 (cultivated plants and domesticated species). The Task Force will also seek to identify linkages and opportunities for establishing species conservation Targets in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (such as SDGs 14 and 15), and potentially other international agreements, such as the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).
- Have close linkages with other relevant bodies in the IUCN SSC network e.g., the Red List Committee. The latter has outlined the clear role of The IUCN Red List in helping countries to define / drive actions to achieve and report on national targets (which could be also called something similar to Nationally Determined Contributions as in the UNFCCC's Paris Agreement).

The Task Force will seek to build upon and distribute information from the revised SSC Species Conservation Planning Guidance (version 2, approved by SSC Steering Committee August 2017)

As the purpose of the Task Force is to work with the IUCN Secretariat to provide advice to Parties in order to help establish revised or new goals relating to species conservation beyond 2020, the Task Force will need to work according to the timetable established under the CBD from 2017 to 2020.

- The Task Force will meet and discuss issues remotely, but will also seek to use existing international and regional meetings and conferences to hold consultations and face to face meetings.
- The Task Force will seek to present its views and scientific assessments via: the IUCN Position Papers for CBD COP14, and COP15, and relevant intersessional meetings of the Subsidiary Body on Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 21, 22, 23 and 24) and Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI2 and 3); through preparation of INF documents for the aforementioned meetings; via scientific publications; and other grey publications and reports.

The Task Force has the opportunity to create a webpage on the IUCN website. The hosting of this page with IUCN may change if funding becomes available, with the building of an external website, and ensuring that communication, both internally within IUCN and externally (as appropriate), raises awareness and the profile of the Task Force including the use of social media, the SSC e-bulletin and engagement with its members through suitable platforms such as listservs.

5. Is there a unique/core group of relevant experts willing to dedicate energy and time towards furthering a conservation agenda around a particular taxon or group of species?

The proposal has arisen from the opportunity/request described under 3) above and the recognition (as well as concern) of the absence of a global species focus on what may or should follow Aichi Target 12. We have, therefore, spent time aligning the needs with the mechanism for working within the IUCN processes for engaging with CBD and other work underway within IUCN (e.g., WCPA as noted above). Those who have already said that they are willing serve on the Task Force, or provide support include:

Braulio Dias

The following is a list of IUCN members of staff who will also engage with the Task Force, e.g., by providing, institutional support, technical contributions, as well as assisting with alignment and coordination with ongoing post-2020 discussions and initiatives across IUCN:

Natasha Ali, Global Protected Area Programme
Thomas Brooks, Science and Knowledge
Dao Nguyen, Global Species Programme
Sonia Pena Moreno, Global Policy Unit
Jane Smart, Global Species Programme

Based on expressions of interest already received, the following people are all a list potential members who are currently being contacted by Philip McGowan to discuss their engagement in the Task Force:

Stu Butchart
Wendy Elliot
Domitilla Raimondo
Paul Smith
Katherine Secoy
Bruce Young
David Hole
David Mallon
Jörg Freyhof

We recognise that there are regions not yet represented, and will seek to identify potential members from those parts of the world (particularly Asia).

The approach is for the Task Force to comprise a core team of individuals who have relevant technical or subject-specific knowledge and policy expertise, and who are willing to actively engage in the work of the group for the next three years. Relevant expertise includes, *inter alia*: species conservation planning; scientific research in species conservation and species assessment (including red lists); sustainable use; trade of species (including trade of threatened species, CITES and illegal wildlife trade); alien invasive species; migratory species; and national and international policy processes. Once the Task Force is formally established, the membership will also naturally evolve through the Chair actively recruiting members as well as additional expressions of interest by individuals as the presence and profile of the group increases.

6) Is clear leadership available?

The Chair of the SSC has nominated Dr Philip McGowan (Newcastle University, United Kingdom) to set up and lead a Task Force to look at the specific issue of species conservation under the CBD after the year 2020. He is leading a three year research project at Newcastle University (with Louise Mair, see under 2) above) on Target 12 that seeks to understand why progress has been limited and what guidance or decision-support would allow better progress. There is a clear link between that project and the work of the proposed Task Force, and offers additional research support and leadership to the Task Force. The Task Force is to be established as soon as possible in order to input into relevant discussions and inform

decision-making under the CBD, during the lead-up to 2020, when it is likely that a new plan for biodiversity under the CBD will be adopted by Parties.

7) Is there an institutional source for support and co-ordination?

Yes, Philip McGowan can draw on the institutional support of Newcastle University (UK), where leadership of this Task Force can be incorporated into his research and engagement work. He can draw on both the Institute for Sustainability (of which he is currently Director) and the School of Natural and Environmental Sciences, where he co-leads the Modelling, Evidence and Policy Research Group to administer the Task Force. The Institute for Sustainability will be engaging (on behalf of the university) with the UN High Level Political Forum next summer, where Sustainable Development Goal 15 is one of five Goals for which progress is being reviewed. This institutional base provides the potential to seek additional support from within the university as required. For example, there are funds that could be used to support the Task Force's work, if matching funds can be found. In addition, it may be possible to host an international meeting on the future of species in late 2018/early 2019.

References

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2014) *Global Biodiversity Outlook 4*. Montréal, 155 pages. Available at <https://www.cbd.int/gbo/gbo4/publication/gbo4-en.pdf>.