

Craig Bennett - IUCN Candidate Manifesto (long version)

Candidate for IUCN Council (Elected from the Region – West Europe)

Since announcing my candidacy for IUCN Council a few months ago, I've been taking the time to speak and listen to IUCN Members about what they believe the priorities should be for IUCN Council over the next four years.

I'm very grateful to everyone that has shared thoughts with me, and look forward to hearing from other IUCN members between now and at World Conservation Congress.



It is clear to me that we are at a critical moment in the history of IUCN – a moment at which it is absolutely vital that we come together as a Union; a moment when, if we can become more than the sum of our parts, then we can start to reverse the decline in nature.

But for this to happen, we need to be more efficient and effective and more aligned as a Union than ever before.

I have a proven track record, over 25 years, of leadership, management and governance in complicated national and international federations, and I want to draw on this experience to help IUCN at this critical time.

If elected to IUCN Council, my top five priorities would be:

- 1) Ensuring the effective and efficient implementation of Strategic Vision (2045) and Programme (2026-2029).** Assuming these two documents are formally adopted by members at the World Conservation Congress, I believe the first duty of IUCN Council is to ensure their implementation (noting that organisations and federations can often fall into the trap of thinking 'job done' when strategy documents are adopted, rather than appreciating that this is only the start!)

I hope to draw on my deep experience of federations, to help guide this implementation. For me one of the guiding principles must be about how we make sure IUCN uses this critical moment to become more efficient and effective and more aligned as a Union than ever before. We all need to be thinking of IUCN as "we", rather than "they", and a big part of this is ensuring clarity of roles between the different component parts of IUCN; IUCN is not (just) the Secretariat.

But in what is a very large, detailed set of strategy documents (admittedly with lots of good thinking in them), it strikes me we probably need some areas of focus that can bring the Union together (Secretariat, Members, Commissions, National and Regional Committees) in a cross-cutting way and deliver tangible outcomes within the next four years. One of these, surely, should be to unite to ensure the best possible delivery, on the ground, of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) – and not just 30x30, important as that is. Another is to get the High Seas Treaty (BBNJ) up and running, ratified and delivering outcomes. There are probably other good contenders, perhaps some at every Regional level, but there shouldn't be too many if we want our Union to realise greater focus.

- 2) Ensuring clarity of roles, avoiding duplication and competition and helping IUCN become 'more than the sum of its parts':** My long experience in large complex federations means I have an excellent understanding of the tensions that can sometimes exist between member organisations and their coordinating secretariats. I have experienced this from the perspective of a Secretariat, a member organisation, and while serving on international boards. Most importantly, I have developed a sense of

how to overcome these tensions, by driving greater strategic alignment and ensuring the different constituent parts of federations develop clarity of roles, and compliment rather than compete against each other.

As we lean into that designation of “union”, we need all parts of the Union to celebrate and champion the role of on-the-ground delivery done primarily by IUCN members, and the role of coordination, join-up, galvanising and promotion done primarily by the IUCN Secretariat.

When there is so much to do, we cannot afford any sense of competition or duplication between members, or between members and the Secretariat. In particular, we need to avoid overstretch within the IUCN Secretariat (being expected to do too much at any one time), and overreach (undertaking activities that are better delivered by IUCN members).

But we also need The IUCN Secretariat to be supported and encouraged to lead and coordinate work that the Secretariat is best placed to do. An example could be to explore how a data sharing agreement might be developed between IUCN members to enable the Union to fully exploit the potential of big data and AI, in an ethical way, to transform our collective understanding of nature, and gather evidence about the effectiveness of different conservation approaches.

In summary, if elected to IUCN Council, I will act in the interests of IUCN Members to avoid ‘mission creep’ by the IUCN Secretariat. But I will also work to ensure we have a strong, empowered and well supported and motivated Secretariat to do the job that we, the members, need it to do.

- 3) **Leaning in to help drive IUCN’s Transformative Change agenda at the Nature-Global Change Nexus.** The identification in the Strategic Vision of the need for IUCN to address the interconnectedness between biodiversity, water, food, health and climate change to ensure nature continues to support all life on the planet, is a powerful new ‘Impact Area’ for the Union. But, for progress to be made in this area, IUCN will need to develop some new, nimble, *horizontal* ways of working on these cross-cutting issues in a federation where, historically, many of our structures have been ‘vertical’ and – to some extent – siloed in their focus (noting that this can also have a value).

I am keen to draw on my experience of driving join-up, in a light touch way, across issue specialisms within large Federations to help ensure IUCN addresses these interconnections, and I believe the Union may struggle with progress in this important impact area without attention and support from IUCN Council.

My starting assumption would be that there may be some ‘quick wins’ to realise, such as building greater synergies between IUCN’s work on climate and nature (through work on climate adaptation for nature, nature-based solutions, and nature-positive renewables and grids). I also think the role of Subnational Governments (including Cities and Regions) in IUCN presents great opportunities to help drive and deliver interconnected solutions on the ground, and areas of focus and pull through across the Nature-Global Change Nexus.

- 4) **Policy and Advocacy:** I am keen to use my 25 years of experience working in the local, national and international policy and advocacy space to help IUCN build its “catalytic role” in this area, as set out in The 20 Year Strategic Vision, and take it to the next level.

The unique make up of IUCN, incorporating State Members, Civil Society, the Commissions, and Regional and National Committees means the Union is theoretically extremely well placed to deliver the impact and influence needed to make change happen for nature.

But we are not as aligned as we could be in this space, as a Union, and I would be keen for us to use a couple of forthcoming opportunities (such as implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework, and the ratification and delivery of the High Seas Treaty) to test how IUCN could collectively become more impactful in the policy and advocacy arena.

There will be similar opportunities within specific regions too, such as in Europe, where there is an urgent need to move forward with legislative approaches to Nature Restoration; within the EU but also across the whole region in a coherent and joined up way. If elected to IUCN Council, I would be keen to explore the opportunity for IUCN to build bridges between EU and non-EU member states so that the whole European region can share more of a common vision for nature restoration across the continent.

- 5) **Communications and Convening:** I am keen to draw on my widely recognised skills as an excellent communicator and convenor to help IUCN tell a better story about what it is, and what its Strategic Vision is for the future.

For many, even within IUCN member organisations, the Union appears overwhelming and difficult to understand. This means that opportunities to engage and convene a more diverse range of stakeholders, from development organisations, business, labour organisations, local communities and indigenous communities are being lost. It is so important that we reach beyond our own 'bubble' of the global nature community, and convene and connect with these other groupings.

In a digital age, I believe IUCN should review what how we can better engage IUCN Members and other stakeholders, not least in decision making, in between IUCN Congresses.

The next IUCN Council will need to do all this, and more, while also upholding IUCN's values, and navigating risk wisely through what is likely to be a difficult period of geopolitics.

I believe I could make an exceptional contribution to IUCN Council through this period, if elected as Councillor for the Regions (West Europe), but working hard on behalf of all IUCN Members in every region, and all constituents parts of IUCN.

Please see my candidate page with CV, letters of endorsement from supporting IUCN members:

[Craig BENNETT for position: Councillor elected from the Region – West Europe | IUCN World Conservation Congress](#)

[Please see my VIDEO MANIFESTO HERE](#)

Email: cbennett@wildlifetrusts.org