

Why do I want to contribute?

With my decision to nominate myself as Regional Councillor, I aim to contribute to IUCN's role as an international convener on nature, climate, and people. Below are my reasons for accepting this nomination and my intentions for the coming years:

- The primary reason for taking this step is my concern about the increasing global polarization and the rise of populist leadership in many countries. This trend is creating an environment in which long-term nature and climate actions and policies are compromised. In such a climate—where both scientific evidence and local and Indigenous knowledge are often disregarded—the role of an international convener like IUCN, where NGOs, governments, scientists and business can meet, discuss, and collaborate, is more critical than ever.
- While I recognize the emergence of many innovative initiatives and platforms addressing environmental challenges, I do not believe that IUCN has become irrelevant or a relic of the past. IUCN's strength lies in setting internationally agreed-upon principles and standards for biodiversity conservation, ecosystem management, restoration, and the sustainable use of land and marine ecosystems—while providing policy support at all levels.
- This means that IUCN's convening power must continue and strengthened, fully acknowledging and embracing new and emerging efforts within the environmental movement—such as regenerative and bioregional initiatives—and the valuable contributions of business and above all Indigenous peoples, whose knowledge has shaped sustainable practices for millennia. However, it would be ignorant and short-sighted to assume that IUCN can fulfill this mission alone.
- Today, most businesses recognize that climate disasters and the degradation of our planet's ecological foundation pose a serious risk—not only to the environment but also to their own future. For me, harnessing the power of business and finance is essential to driving real change. However, this must be done through carefully structured, long-term agreements spanning decades—ensuring genuine commitment while avoiding any form of greenwashing. Above all, we must prioritize long-term stakeholder value over short-term shareholder gains.
- As a member-driven organization, IUCN must prioritize empowering its membership to lead systemic change from the ground up. The Secretariat should not function as a competitor to its members but rather as an enabler—unlocking funding, strengthening networks, and amplifying the collective impact of NGOs, businesses, and governments. This is not an easy task, but it is critical to ensuring that IUCN functions effectively in the future. It's why I am committed to reducing tensions between IUCN members and the Secretariat.
- While nominated for West Europe, I bring an international perspective with a strong focus on grassroots, Indigenous, local, and bioregional initiatives, but also on involving business to work on solutions.
- I fully embrace the five pathways to transformative change outlined in IUCN's Nature 2030 vision: Recognize, Retain, Restore, Resource, and Reconnect. However, of all these "R's," I believe the most important is **Reconnect**—first with our inner selves, then with others, and then with nature—before we can reconnect societies and economies with nature and rebuild connections between fragmented habitats.
- Finally, my decision is rooted in deep gratitude for the opportunities I have had to work in international conservation, restoration, and sustainable ecosystem management over the years. My goal is to empower the IUCN President, Director General, and leadership team through meaningful dialogues on strategy and vision—while focusing on practical implementation. I am a thinker, but above all, I am a doer.

Above all, I'm passionate about people and building meaningful relationships



Willem Ferwerda, 27 February 2025