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An integrated research project

Speaking a Common Language

An assessment of the IUCN
categories of protected areas
carried out for the World
Commission on Protected Areas by
Cardiff University and partners

*An issues paper for the
World Parks Congress*

August 2003

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The authors would be pleased to receive any comments about the content and opinions expressed in this paper and on suggestions for how future editions could be strengthened and improved. Please send comments to the contact above.

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A letter from the chair of the World Commission on Protected Areas

"The IUCN Protected Area Management Categories system provides the basic language with which protected areas people around the world can communicate. Increasingly, too, it is being used to raise management standards. Its future development is therefore of great interest to IUCN, and to its World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) in particular. This is why WCPA is pleased to be associated with the research work now underway – *Speaking a Common Language* – which will throw more light on how the system is being used and how it should develop in future. The future of the categories will be an important topic at the forthcoming World Parks Congress (WPC) (Durban, South Africa, September 2003) and at the next Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD/COP7) in 2004."



Kenton Miller, Chair: World Commission on Protected Areas

***Speaking a
common
language***

*A progress
review, with
recommendations
on the IUCN system
of protected area
management
categories*

August 2003

The *Speaking a Common Language* project

Speaking a Common Language is a project to assess the ways in which the IUCN protected area management categories can be used to further conservation action on the ground. The objectives of the project are to:

- Establish the impact and effectiveness of the 1994 IUCN guidance, and previous incarnations, in terms of the adoption and influence of the categories system, nationally, regionally and internationally;
- Examine what needs to be done to develop and promote the objectives-based system of protected area categories itself, and consider how it should be linked to other initiatives;
- Involve a wide range of stakeholders in the work, notably through the World Parks Congress (Durban, South Africa, September 2003);
- Guide the programme of work on protected areas of the Convention on Biological Diversity; and
- To provide technical advice on the category system to a proposed programme of work on protected areas for IUCN.

The project assumes comment and approval from a wide range of stakeholders. Outputs should lead to:

- Better appreciation of the significance of the objectives-based categories system;
- Improved understanding of the impact of the system;
- Critical appreciation of the successes and difficulties encountered;
- Advice on capacity building to improve application of the system, particularly at the national and sub-national level; and
- Recommendations to IUCN and the international conservation community on the further development of the system.

The project is being carried out jointly by Cardiff University and Equilibrium, working with IUCN and the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre. It is supported by IUCN, Conservation International, WWF International, Shell, BP and the International Council on Mining and Metals. It began in May 2002 and will last two years. Following discussions at the World Parks Congress, recommendations will be made to IUCN and to the 7th Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Project outputs: year one

From May 2002 until July 2003 the work has been to canvass a wide a range of stakeholders for input into the discussions, and to research and write a series of case studies intended to provide input into the final report.



The project ran a workshop in the Cotswolds, England, with an international audience

Getting people involved: a number of steps have been taken:

- Creation of a web site (www.cf.ac.uk/cplan/sacl/) and related features and links to the site on web sites, i.e. IUCN and WCPA.
- Development of a questionnaire to stimulate discussion and generate ideas. This was mailed to all WCPA members and was incorporated into the questionnaire sent by UNEP-WCMC to national protected area agencies as part of the exercise to up-date the UN list.
- A series of meeting around the globe (travel budget provide by other projects) to discuss the project: in Cameroon, Austria, Switzerland, Uganda, South Africa, Italy, Australia, Thailand and Vietnam.
- Two workshops, one in the UK in May 2003 and the second to be held within the management effectiveness stream at the WPC.

The IUCN protected area management categories provide an international framework for protected areas



Research: 18 draft case studies and 5 information sheets have been developed on a range of issues including forests, marine protected areas, traditional and indigenous people, energy, mining, tourism, reporting and data collection, zoning and buffer zones, the history of the categories, legal and policy frameworks, multiple-use protected areas, and use by NGOs and aid agencies. These have been developed with, and sometimes written by, experts in the subjects covered. An intern at IUCN's Environmental Law Centre in Bonn was contracted to review legal material. Once case studies have been agreed by the acknowledged experts, they are posted on the SaCL web site for further comment.

The IUCN Protected Area Management Categories

Twenty-five years ago, IUCN developed a preliminary system of protected area management categories, defined by the main management objective. The Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas (now World Commission on Protected Areas - WCPA), reviewed these, the 4th World Parks Congress in Caracas confirmed changes, and the IUCN General Assembly approved them in 1994. The definition and categories follow:

Definition: *An area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means.*

Category Ia: Strict nature reserve/wilderness protection area managed mainly for science or wilderness protection – an area of land and/or sea possessing some outstanding or representative ecosystems, geological or physiological features and/or species, available primarily for scientific research and/or environmental monitoring.

Category Ib: Wilderness area: protected area managed mainly for wilderness protection – large area of unmodified or slightly modified land and/or sea, retaining its natural characteristics and influence, without permanent or significant habitation, which is protected and managed to preserve its natural condition.

Category II: National park: protected area managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation – natural area of land and/or sea designated to (a) protect the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for present and future generations, (b) exclude exploitation or occupation inimical to the purposes of designation of the area and (c) provide a foundation for spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities, all of which must be environmentally and culturally compatible.

Category III: Natural monument: protected area managed mainly for conservation of specific natural features – area containing specific natural or natural/cultural feature(s) of outstanding or unique value because of their inherent rarity, representativeness or aesthetic qualities or cultural significance.

Category IV: Habitat/Species Management Area: protected area managed mainly for conservation through management intervention – area of land and/or sea subject to active intervention for management purposes so as to ensure the maintenance of habitats to meet the requirements of specific species.

Category V: Protected Landscape/Seascape: protected area managed mainly for landscape/seascape conservation or recreation – area of land, with coast or sea as appropriate, where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant aesthetic, ecological and/or cultural value, and often with high biological diversity. Safeguarding the integrity of this traditional interaction is vital to the area's protection, maintenance and evolution.

Category VI: Managed Resource Protected Area: protected area managed mainly for the sustainable use of natural resources – area containing predominantly unmodified natural systems, managed to ensure long-term protection and maintenance of biological diversity, while also providing a sustainable flow of natural products and services to meet community needs.

Key issues for discussion

On the following four pages, we outline some of the critical issues that have emerged during the research and discussions related to the project. To date, the project team have been able to communicate with only a small proportion of those involved in protected areas management – we still need feedback and ideas as the project develops.

Original uses of the IUCN protected area categories

See case studies on zoning in protected areas, transboundary protected areas and applying the categories in Vietnam

Encouraging national protected area systems: the categories aimed to help protected area agencies to plan their systems, by describing a suite of different management approaches. In some cases – e.g. Australia – this has worked well, but in other countries they have been less well understood and sometimes result in confusion. There are questions about how categories relate to transboundary protected areas and how different management zones within larger protected areas can be reflected in the category system: of particular importance to marine protected areas

- ***Have the categories generally helped, hindered or been irrelevant to developing national or regional protected area networks?***
- ***What are the implications of proposed zoning of categories in marine protected areas for terrestrial protected areas?***
- ***Should the UN List of Protected Areas contain an annex on transboundary protected areas (as well as listing the individual component protected areas in the normal way)?***

See case study on standardising names of protected areas

Reducing confusion: a principal reason for developing the categories system was to reduce confusion in the use of terms, for example between different uses of the term “national park” (the research team found “national parks” categorised under all six of the IUCN categories showing that there is little standardisation of terms around the world). Hence indeed the title of our research project.

- ***It has been suggested that in future editions the names should be omitted from the definitions of categories, e.g. category II protected areas should no longer also be described as “national parks” – would this help further reduce confusion?***
- ***Some indigenous peoples’ groups have objected to the term “wilderness” because it is often used for areas that have been managed in traditional, extensive ways. Others believe that wilderness values are important to recognise and protect. Is wilderness a necessary term for the categories to include?***

Providing international standards: there are currently proposals for increased emphasis on management effectiveness and development of basic standards for protected areas.

- ***Should management effectiveness be reflected within the system – perhaps through inclusion in the UN List of Protected Areas, as a separate listing that would not affect the category itself?***
- ***Would it be useful to have more detailed guidance on what should or should not take place in given categories or is this oversimplifying a complex situation?***

See case studies on forests and on large multiple use protected areas

Framework for handling data: experiences with the UN list, the UNECE Forest Resource Assessment, categorising large multiple use areas and national efforts to categorise protected areas suggest that in some cases further guidance is needed in understanding and interpreting the categories. IUCN published further advice on the application of the categories in Europe and on Category V; it has also agreed on the need to develop additional guidance on forest protected areas.

- ***In what situations are the current guidelines on the application of the categories unclear, or in need of further amplification? Is there a need for further regionally-based advice? Or for further advice on particular categories, and if so which? Or relating to particular biomes, such as the marine environment?***

New and developing uses of the IUCN categories

Along with "traditional" uses, the IUCN categories have also, since 1994, been used in a variety of new roles: many of the questions that have arisen about the categories come because they are being used in ways that were not originally planned. Some of this appears to be a natural and probably healthy progression, but it has thrown up a variety of questions and some tensions. The sections below identify some major points that have been raised or become obvious during research for "Speaking a Common Language"

See Environmental Law Centre working paper on categories and legislation

IUCN categories as a basis of legislation: research carried out for the project at IUCN's Environmental Law Centre in Bonn found that IUCN protected area categories were already being used as a basis of law in several countries and in the new African convention.

- ***Do the IUCN categories provide a strong enough or an appropriate basis for legislation?***
- ***Is use in legislation taking the categories beyond their capabilities?***

See case studies on mining and energy extraction

IUCN categories as a means of controlling changes in land use: on a number of occasions, the categories have been used as a tool for controlling major changes in use, for example through mining (notably the Amman recommendation that governments ban mining in category I-IV protected areas). These uses have created tension, in part because those affected are unconvinced that the categories are assigned with enough care, or enough stakeholder participation, to be strong enough vehicles for such significant policy positions or even resulting legislation.

- ***Like it or not, categories are increasingly being used as a means of determining land use – this being the case, how should their assignment and use be changed or strengthened to reflect this?***

See case study on marine protected areas

IUCN categories as a means of managing existing or traditional uses within protected areas: categories are being used to help define management of marine resources (e.g. "no take zones"), non-timber forest products collection, traditional hunting etc – particularly through use of categories V and VI to facilitate management of cultural resources but categories II-IV have also frequently evolved to allow these uses.

- ***Do marine protected areas need special treatment? Can current work on management effectiveness of marine protected areas and definition of their objectives help to clarify how the categories are used in the marine environment?***

See case study on indigenous and traditional peoples

IUCN categories as a system for interpreting or clarifying land tenure: the categories have increasingly been used as a way of both defining and in some cases creating sanctuaries for indigenous or traditional peoples, for example through Indigenous Protected Areas in Australia, native peoples' sanctuaries in Latin America etc.

- ***Are special guidelines needed for the use of categories by indigenous and traditional peoples?***
- ***What implications does this new use have for other stakeholders?***
- ***How can governance issues be reflected in the UN List of Protected Areas?***

IUCN categories used as a tool for bioregional planning: as conservation planning and practice gradually become more broadscale, aiming at bioregions or ecoregions, protected areas provide a suite of management responses that need to be integrated into a mosaic of other uses. The extent to which the IUCN categories can be transformed from descriptive to policy forming is still under discussion.

- ***Do the categories provide a useful tool for large-scale planning and should they be explicitly included in such exercises?***

Use of the categories for advocacy: in practice, the IUCN categories are also being used as a tool for advocacy – in terms of lobbying for certain constraints in given categories in general or using the fact that an area is in a certain category to promote particular management responses.

- ***Are the IUCN categories an effective means of lobbying for better protection or management, or does this type of use undermine their more neutral descriptive function?***

Using the categories more effectively

The project has also created an opportunity to focus more generally on the way that the categories are used, on a possible future revision of the guidelines for the categories, on the relationship between the categories and the IUCN definition of a protected area, and on the link between the IUCN definition and that of the CBD.

Dissemination of information: particularly through the World Protected Area data-base managed by UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre and also other information sources

- ***Some of the problems identified are due poor understanding and translating the categories into more languages would help to address this: in this case should there be principles for translation to make sure that clarity is maintained – e.g. verification process for technical terms, increased use of glossary etc?***

International processes: one of the issues addressed by the project is an examination of the options for more international adoption of the categories, for example in national reporting on protected areas within the Convention on Biological Diversity. At present the CBD has its own definition of a protected area, which is not the same as IUCN's.

See case studies on improving category designation and on large multiple use protected areas

- **Should WCPA be working to secure greater international recognition of the IUCN protected area definition and associated categories, or should it consider adopting the CBD definition?**
- **How can the categories be used best to help promote greater harmonisation of reporting of protected areas under the CBD?**

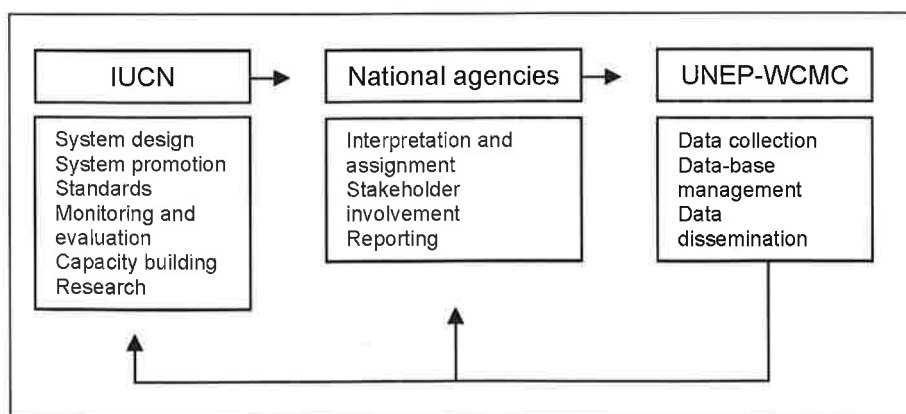
Principles for assignment of categories: Currently governments are asked to assign protected areas to categories. Some fail to do so (in which case the areas affected will in future appear as 'un-assigned' in the UN List). Other countries assign protected areas but not always to the satisfaction of all stakeholders. The need for a revised way of reporting categories, which includes a more effective, responsible and logical process of assignment is evident, including one with greater stakeholder involvement and transparency, and perhaps guided by an agreed set of principles for assignment.

- **UNEP-WCMC has suggested that some clear procedures and principles are needed for the assignment of categories – are these needed and if so, what should they contain?**
- **Is there a need for some form of grievance system for challenging the assignment of categories made by governments? If so, how might it work?**

Principles and criteria for the definition: one clear need identified is for WCPA to provide additional guidance on what is and what is not a protected area, particularly with respect to areas with some conservation role (such as protective forests against avalanches), which are nonetheless not full IUCN protected areas.

- **Should IUCN spend effort in seeking to define those areas of land or water that have some protective functions but are not full protected areas?**
- **What additional advice should IUCN give to help interpret the definition of a protected area?**

Responsibility for the categories: a discussion of the relationship between IUCN/WCPA, national agencies and UNEP-WCMC has been underway for some time. A tentative relationship is illustrated below:



All the case studies can be downloaded from www.cf.ac.uk/cplan/

- **Is this the right relationship?**
- **Should other stakeholders be more closely involved?**

A vision for the protected area categories

This draft vision has been drawn up to stimulate debate about the goals for the categories over the next decade

By the time of the next World Parks Congress in 2013: the IUCN definition and management categories of protected areas are respected as the practical and philosophical framework for planning, managing and monitoring protected areas. They are widely understood and are used as an important tool in protected area management by national agencies, international bodies such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the business sector, NGOs and many local communities.

As such, they provide accepted guidance both to help plan protected area networks and also to make rational decisions about issues of policy that affect protected areas.

Because of their management implications, designation of IUCN protected area categories is an important part of any protected area planning process. Categories are increasingly decided with the full involvement of stakeholders, who can draw on a wide range of tools to help them in the form of agreed principles, material in local languages and additional guidance on use in particular situations.

Questions and disagreements are addressed through a globally-agreed grievance system and some national protected area agencies already use independent assessors working to a certification system, to ensure that categories have been successfully assigned.

The IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas provides support for the categories, ensuring that guidance is up to date, helping to build capacity within countries and coordinating research, development of additional advice and monitoring of use of the categories.

Data on protected areas are stored, analysed and made widely available by the UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), providing a global information source not only on the size, location and management aims but also the success of the protected area in terms of management effectiveness, information about its governance and values and reference material such as management plans. The database is maintained by national agencies working directly with UNEP-WCMC.

The vision is not a firm prediction, but a set of ideas to start people thinking



The workshop started by confirming the value of the IUCN protected area categories



Core conclusions and recommendations for discussion at the World Parks Congress

In May 2003, the Speaking a Common Language project ran a workshop, which developed a series of draft recommendations to IUCN. Workshop delegates specifically requested that these issues be discussed at the follow-on workshop during the World Parks Congress, with further opportunities for consultation until the end of October 2003, before being presented to IUCN. A full version of the workshop proceedings is available on CD or on the project website.

On the following pages, the recommendations are summarised as a series of discussion points for the World Parks Congress workshop

The *Speaking a Common Language* Workshop:

- **Re-affirmed the value to conservation of the 1994 system**
- **Agreed that an objectives-based system of protected area categorisation was the essential foundation of a protected areas category system**
- **Endorsed the emerging finding that no changes should be recommended in the definitions and “broad architecture” of the 6-category system**

However, since the publication of the categories in 1994 a number of new uses have arisen, often without the explicit involvement of IUCN. These include use of the categories to:

- To help to determine appropriate **activities**
- To provide **quality standards**
- To provide information for **advocacy**
- To form the basis for protective area **legislation**
- To be a tool in **bioregional planning**

This has stretched the categories, in some cases beyond their original aims, necessitating a number of responses from IUCN and from partner organisations.

Recommendations for IUCN

- Produce a revised, up-dated edition of the guidelines, based on the 6-category system, accompanied by coordinated supplementary advice on priority issues. A number of issues to be discussed within this revision:
 - Emphasise marine and freshwater protected areas and livelihoods
 - Consider dropping names and using only management objectives and numbers in categories
 - Consider adding governance and management effectiveness as descriptors
 - Redo the matrix of management objectives



The current proposal is for WCPA to develop a new version of the guidelines for the IUCN protected area categories during 2004

- Inclusion of principles within the categories system
- Better summary definitions of the categories
- Make the revision process of the guidelines as inclusive as possible
- Allow greater accessibility through translations beyond the three official IUCN languages
- Invest in awareness / capacity-building (training etc), including of social issues, in the categories system
- Cooperate with partners in development of additional advice (if appropriate in separate publications) on:
 - How the categories fit into a larger conservation vision
 - Development of best practice guidelines on assignment of protected areas to categories (with UNEP-WCMC)
 - Development of a grievance procedure in relation to category assignment
 - Legal implications of the role of the categories with regard to national protected areas legislation
 - Distinguishing marine protected areas from fishery management areas
 - Use of IUCN protected area categories for forest protected areas
 - Develop case studies to illustrate issues relating to the categories
 - Analysing possible anomalies in use or misuse of the categories systems including with respect to indigenous and community rights
 - Promoting the use of the full range of IUCN categories at national, regional and international levels as appropriate

World Parks Congress (September 2003)

- Agree a strong statement of support for the categories – e.g. in Durban Accord and Action Plan
- Present key findings in the Management Effectiveness stream workshop and a leaflet in several languages
- Make links to other workshops (e.g. Governance, Linkages in the Landscape and cross-cutting themes like Marine, Equity and People)
- Investigate links to field-trips



The next CBD Conference of Parties will be a major opportunity for discussion about the categories

Convention on Biological Diversity (COP7, May 2004)

- Seek inter-governmental recognition that this is the international system for categorizing protected areas
- Coordinate with sympathetic delegates and UNEP-WCMC on the development of a work programme paper that will be presented to SBSTTA-9
- Start a process to address the different definitions of a 'protected area' used by IUCN and CBD
- Seek harmonisation of reporting on protected area under CBD by the greater use of the system.

World Conservation Congress (November, 2004)

- Agree a recommendation on the future of the categories system to IUCN, including inclusion of a work programme in the next Quadrennial Programme.



The following draft recommendation has been put forward to the World Parks Congress. To comment, go to: http://www.iucn.org/the_mes/wcpa/wpc2003/english/outputs/recommendations.htm

IUCN Protected Area Management Categories

Draft recommendation for the Vth World Parks Congress

Recommendation 17 of the 4th WPC held in Caracas, Venezuela, February 1992 calls for a system of six categories of protected areas based upon management objectives.

Resolution number 19.4 of the IUCN General Assembly in Buenos Aires (January 1994) endorses the system developed at Caracas and urges all governments to consider the relevance of the categories system to national legislation.

Publication of the *Guidelines for Protected Area Management Categories* by IUCN in 1994 provides advice on the new system agreed to at Buenos Aires. Also, the results of the research work (*Speaking a Common Language*) undertaken in preparation for the 5th World Parks Congress on the impact of the 1994 categories system, provide insights.

Finally, in particular the new ways in which the category system is now being used - none of which was clearly envisaged in 1994 – serve to raise the importance of the system, for example:

- in determining appropriate activities in protected areas (e.g., in respect of mining and protected areas);
- in establishing relevant criteria to assess management effectiveness;
- in advocacy in relation to protected areas;
- as the basis for national protected area legislation and policy, and international agreements; and
- as a tool in bioregional planning.

Therefore, PARTICIPANTS in the 5th World Parks Congress, in Durban, South Africa (5-17 September 2003):

1. RE-AFFIRM the value to conservation of the 1994 system of protected area management categories, and in particular that an objectives-based approach should remain the essential foundation of a protected areas category system, and that no fundamental changes are required in the current list of six categories and their definitions;
2. RE-AFFIRM that the integrity of the protected areas categories system is the responsibility of IUCN, and that it should reinforce its efforts, through its membership as well as through WCPA and other commissions, to promote the understanding of the full range of IUCN categories at national and international levels;
3. ADVISE, however, that the new purposes for which the system is now being used necessitate the following responses from IUCN, in collaboration with partner organisations urgently produce, through an open, participatory process, a revised, up-dated edition of the 1994 guidelines, which:
 - a. builds on the existing objectives set out for each category, including by improved summary definitions of the categories;
 - b. includes a set of criteria and principles which should underpin the categories system and its application;
 - c. explains how the categories relate to ecological networks and wider regional planning;
 - d. considers removing generic names of protected areas from the category system, as these may have different meanings in

- different countries, and using only management objectives and numbers for each category;
- e. redesigns the "Matrix of Management Objectives and IUCN Protected Area Management Categories" in the 1994 edition, so as to relate better to current experience in protected areas;
 - f. gives more emphasises to marine and freshwater protected areas and livelihoods;
 - g. provides guidance on the inclusion within the system of private protected areas, and of those managed by local and indigenous communities;
 - h. clarifies the recommended process by which protected areas are assigned to categories;
 - i. suggests how protected areas, which are assigned to their category by primary management objectives, can also be described by reference to the organisation responsible for their governance, the effectiveness of their management and the degree to which they retain their naturalness; and
 - j. makes these revised guidelines available in IUCN's official languages and also in other languages as permitted by available resources;
4. **ADVISE FURTHER** that IUCN, in collaboration with partner organisations, urgently invest in awareness raising and capacity building about the use of the categories system, based upon the foregoing and working with partners such as UNEP/WCMC, through training, case studies and additional published guidance (linked to the updated 1994 guidelines).
 5. **RECOMMEND** that in such awareness raising and capacity building priority should be given to:
 - a. advocating an open, inclusive, and transparent procedure for assignment of protected areas to categories for application at the national level, including a grievance procedure in relation to assignment decisions;
 - b. providing supplementary guidance on other categories, giving priority to Category VI protected areas;
 - c. promoting the use of the categories for forest protected areas; and
 - d. promoting the use of the categories in relation to marine protected areas and especially to fishery management areas;
 6. **URGE** IUCN to develop a monitoring and research programme around the use of the categories, including the legal implications of using categories in legislation, and the implications of the categories system for indigenous and community rights;
 7. **CONSIDER** that the foregoing would be aided by the creation of a task force under the WCPA Management Effectiveness theme;
 8. **URGE** IUCN to work with parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, in preparation for, and during the CBD/COP7, so as to secure:
 - a. inter-governmental recognition of the categories system as the international method for categorizing protected areas; and
 - b. agreement to use the system as a basis for national data collection and reporting to the CBD Secretariat on protected areas;



The recommendation could help shape IUCN's work on categories in the future

9. CALL on all governments to recognise the importance of the decisions that they take on category assignment, made at the request of IUCN and UNEP/WCMC, and to undertake this exercise in a timely manner through open, inclusive, and transparent procedures;
10. RECOMMEND that IUCN's Inter-sessional Programme Framework for 2005 – 08 accommodate a programme of work to further develop and promote the IUCN Protected Areas Categories System, which will be considered by IUCN's members at the 3rd World Conservation Congress (November 2004).

Stream: Management Effectiveness: Maintaining protected areas for now and the future

Stream Lead: Marc Hockings

Motion Lead: Adrian Phillips (adrianp@wcpa.demon.co.uk)



Please send us
your comments and
suggestions!