

# **European Verification and Certification of Protected Areas under the IUCN Management Categories**

## ***WCPA Europe/IUCN Working Group for the Development of a Procedure for Verifying and Certifying the Status and Management of Protected Areas Based on the IUCN Management Categories***

Marija Zupancic-Vicar, Arnold Boer, Alistair Gammell, Matti Helminen, Zbigniew Krzan, Markus Roesler, Andrej Sovinc

### **Background and purpose**

The basic international reference on the location, size and management objectives of protected areas is the United Nations List of Protected Areas prepared and maintained by the UNEP–WCMC (World Conservation Monitoring Centre).

The seventh of the Millennium Development Goals (Ensure environmental sustainability), agreed at the Millennium Summit in September 2000, has an indicator: the land (marine) area protected to maintain biological diversity (indicator 26). To operationalise this indicator, it is necessary to have accurate data available. This list provides an effective means to do this.

International guidance on the categorisation of protected areas have been agreed (Guidelines for Protected Area Management Categories, IUCN/WCPA and WCMC (1994)) (Guidelines), with the objective of:

- alerting governments to the importance of protected areas;
- encouraging governments to develop systems of protected areas with management aims tailored to national and local circumstances;
- reducing the confusion which has arisen from the adoption of many different terms to describe different kinds of protected areas;
- providing international standards to help global and regional accounting and comparisons between countries;
- assisting managers to improve protected area management, in order to better meet the objectives designated for the protected area concerned;
- providing a framework for the collection, handling and dissemination of data about protected areas; and
- generally improving communication and understanding between all those engaged in conservation.

The document: Interpretation and Application of the Protected Area Management Categories in Europe, EUROPARC Federation and IUCN (2000), is an additional basis for guidance and categorisation of protected areas in Europe.

The procedure for listing national protected areas in the UN List requires the national authorities responsible for protected areas to provide the UNEP-WCMC with data on

protected areas, including their status according to the six IUCN protected area management categories. The procedure has no system of verification and – at present – IUCN and UNEP-WCMC have no mandate or opportunity to influence this. In order to improve the quality of the data, it would be desirable to develop an independent verification system. The verification means a process for establishing that a protected area is correctly assigned to a management category. Any such system would depend upon: carefully prepared criteria, thorough procedures, verification by qualified experts (and the use of expert referees), and acceptability to protected area managers and authorities.

There is also the interest of the protected areas to develop a certification system (in Europe for some protected areas certificates were already issued by IUCN). Such a certification is a form of public confirmation that a protected area is correctly assigned to a management category.

In addition, such an independent verification and certification procedure would lead to the establishment of a benchmark for protected areas. The need for a benchmarking of protected areas derives from two main requirements:

- To obtain the necessary support for the fulfilment of the conservation objectives (benchmarking is one of the basic requirements where »quality« is an important criterion and a guarantee of quality is important to marketing areas).
- Better knowledge on the real extent of adequately protected land and sea.

However, it should remain clear that this procedure is only about the verification and certification of the management category to which a protected area belongs, and not how effective it is in achieving its objectives.

### **Benefits of Verification and Certification**

Establishment of an independent verification and certification system for protected areas listed in the UN List might be one of the most effective tools to raise public and business interest in these areas. Protected areas labelled with the IUCN protected area international designation/ certification, could:

- Ensure better data for that protected area was entered into the database of protected areas, thus providing improved knowledge on the real extent of protected land and sea areas;
- Provide better understanding of the IUCN protected area classification system and practical appreciation of the IUCN position that “All protected area categories are important”;
- Help to develop a better image for the IUCN-categorisation;
- Provide additional international pressure on the authorities responsible for management of certified protected area to fulfil management objectives;
- Provide increased protection for these protected areas;
- Upgrade management practices, since the certificate would have to ensure that clear management objectives are in place;
- Increase understanding of protected areas and their aims and different approaches to management;
- Promote partnerships between protected area authorities, business companies, local communities and other stakeholders and generate support and raise awareness for the protected areas;

- Promote the development of a marketing based approach to protected areas, supplementing protected area budgets through appropriate uses and charges and maintaining ongoing governmental support through the strength of public backing;
- Give real publicity to IUCN and WCPA;
- Assist the State and protected area authorities in providing information for the UN List.

## The Major Verification and Certification Elements

The basis of certification are the Guidelines for Protected Area Management Categories (1994) and the Interpretation and Application of the Protected Area Management Categories in Europe (2000).

All categories must fall within the following 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.*

Having regard to the different mix and priorities accorded to the main management objectives, the following emerge clearly as distinct categories of protected areas - areas managed mainly for:

I a	Scientific research and monitoring (i.e. Strict Nature Reserve)
I b	Wilderness protection (i.e. Wilderness Area)
II	Ecosystem conservation and recreation (i.e. National Park)
III	Conservation of natural features (i.e. Natural Monument)
IV	Conservation through active management (i.e. Habitat/Species Management Area)
V	Landscape/seascape conservation and recreation (i.e. Protected Landscape/Seascape)
VI	Sustainable use of natural ecosystems (i.e. Managed Resource Protected Area)

The data gathered should be that which is required to get data for the UN List, as well as the periodic 'UN List' process. The primary mechanism for gathering official information should be from national government agencies - and information concerning Natura 2000, if the country is member of EU. The judgement should be based on the assurance that legal and other instruments are sufficient to ensure the long term achievement of the purpose for which the categorisation was established.

In assigning areas to the categories, the emphasis must be placed on clarifying the objectives for management (Categories I - VI) and ensuring that the right conditions exist for their achievement. The relationship between management objectives and the categories has to be verified by testing the following elements/aspects:

- **categorisation** is by primary management objective;
- **legislation** - to follow the Guidelines for Protected Area Management Categories;
- **management plan** and other planning documents should be examined to identify the objectives of management, and to obtain other relevant data;

- **zoning within protected areas** - in order to establish the appropriate category, at least three-quarters, and preferably more, of the area must be managed for the primary purpose and the management of the remaining area must not be in conflict with that primary purpose;
- **the size of the protected area** - This should be sufficient to accomplish the management objectives;
- **management responsibility** - the actual responsibility for management of individual protected areas may rest with central, regional or local government, non-governmental organisations, the private sector or the local community. The management arrangements should be sufficient to accomplish the management objectives;
- **ownership of land** - the key question is whether the type of ownership is compatible with the achievement of the management objectives for the area;
- **international designations** - providing the area is identified under national arrangements for special protection, it should be appropriately recorded under one or more of the standard categories - World Heritage/Natural Site, Biosphere Reserve, Ramsar site, and other area, as designated under regional agreements.

## Procedure of Verification and Certification

### General regulations

- The verification procedure for the classification of protected areas in the I - VI management categories will be organised by a Regional Verification Committee (Verification Committee), established by Regional WCPA/IUCN (Variant: and confirmed by the IUCN Council);
- Variant: the administrative and technical support to the Verification Committee is provided by the WCPA European Parks for Life Office or the IUCN Regional Office for Europe or the European Topic Centre on Nature Protection and Biodiversity (ETC)
- The Certificate will be issued by IUCN on the proposal of the Verification Committee and with the approval of the Regional Vice Chair of WCPA;
- Verification and certification will be carried out based on the voluntary request of the applicant (variant: and on the request of UNEP-WCMC);
- Variant: If the applicant does not apply for the verification before the inscription of the protected area in the UN List, UNEP-WCMC in its own responsibility provides the verification;
- Certificates will be valid for 5 years (variant: 10 years) and may be renewed by a simple repeat application in which only changed data have to be presented;
- The UN List will be invited to clearly indicate those areas for which status has been verified by IUCN WCPA;

### The procedure

- The Director of the protected area in question and/or the responsible Government Agency (or other adequate Authority responsible for the protected area in question) (the applicant) may apply for verification and certification by the Regional Verification Committee;
- The basic data for verification will be the data provided for the listing of the protected areas in the UN List and the data gathered within the periodic 'UN List' process, as well as information concerning Natura 2000, if the country is member of EU;

- If these data are not available, the basic data necessary to get onto the UN List should be forwarded to the Verification Committee using the UNEP-WCMC's normal data collection format;
- Where a protected area agency maintains a series of sites which have similar characteristics, it may seek a block categorisation which covers sites conforming to those characteristics - a Form for each of the sites with the basic data necessary to get onto the UN List should be submitted;
- All data supplied should be provided by the Director of the protected area in question and endorsed by the responsible Government Agency (or other adequate Authority responsible for the protected area in question)
- If the data provided are sufficient to reach a conclusion on the appropriate categorisation, the Verification Committee will make the judgement on the basis of a Quick Classification Scan (one of the possible alternatives see in Annex III) and propose the classification of the protected area in one of the I - VI management categories;
- If the proposed category is the same as that suggested by the applicant, then IUCN will issue a Certificate and send the data to the UN List as verified;
- If the proposed category is not the same as suggested by the applicant, the applicant will be informed. If he/she is happy with the classification proposed, a Certificate on the basis of the proposal of the Verification Committee will be issued by IUCN and data sent to the UN List as verified;
- If the decision is not acceptable to the applicant, the Verification Committee will explain its reasons for its findings and invite a revised application. In this case the application should, in addition, be countersigned by an independent person of repute, whose responsibility it is to confirm that all revised data is correct. The applicant authority will have six months to resubmit its revised application. If it fails to do so, the original finding will be confirmed and data sent to the UN List. A charge, as in other cases, to cover the costs of running the verification and certification system, has to be accepted by the applicant;
- On receipt of any revised application, the Verification Committee will reconsider the application and give its advice. If this is acceptable to the protected area authority a Certificate will be issued and data sent to the UN List as verified;
- In the event that the decision remains unacceptable to the applicant, the data will be sent to the UN List together with the advice of the Verification Committee. approved by WCPA;

### **Other arrangements**

- At any time the protected area authority may request WCPA to provide a verification visit by international experts. The decision reached following such a visit will be submitted to the UN List, following the procedure set out above. The costs of such visits will be reimbursed by the applicant through the IUCN/WCPA;
- Within its capacities, WCPA is prepared to provide advice to any protected area authority on any question, including issues of categorisation. Such advice may be charged for, but in this case, this will be agreed with the applicant in advance;
- The means of operation and communication (internal/external IUCN), related to the development and operation of the certification system will be defined;
- Persons serving on the Verification Committee or carrying out verification missions or missions to give advice on categorisation, will be required to have received training in the methodology and to apply these consistently. "Case law" on verification and certification decisions will be systematically documented and made publicly available.

## **Financial and other implications**

- The costs to applicants of verification and certification will be published by WCPA;
- Application for categorisation will be accompanied by a payment, as determined by WCPA, to cover the costs of running the verification and certification system;
- Revised application will be also accompanied by the appropriate payment;
- The costs of a consultation and verification visit by international experts on request of the applicant will be agreed by the applicant in advance and will be met by the authority in question;
- The costs of WCPA advice to any protected area authority on any question, including issues of categorisation and the costs of a field visit will be agreed in advance and will be met by the authority in question;
- Protected areas receiving certificates will be placed on the Lifeline circulation list and Lifeline will contain news and information about the certification process;
- Information about certified protected areas will be placed in the WCPA web site with the link to the protected areas.

## **Related Processes for Protected Area Verification and Certification:**

Evaluating Effectiveness: A Framework for Assessing Management of Protected Areas, Marc Hockings with Sue Stolton and Nigel Dudley (July 2000)) - a separate system of evaluating and monitoring the effectiveness of protected area management along the IUCN Protected Area Categories developed by IUCN WCPA;

UNESCO WH: Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage;

Council of Europe: European Diploma.

WWF's Rapid Assessment and Prioritisation methodology;

EUROPARC Federation: The European Charter for sustainable tourism in protected areas;

PAN Parks Verification and Certification concept;

Europarc Federation: "Basic standards for transboundary cooperation between European Protected Areas" .

## **Sources:**

IUCN (1994): Guidelines for Protected Area Management Categories.

(<http://wcpa.iucn.org/pubs/pdfs/IUCNCategories.pdf>)

EUROPARC and WCPA (2000): Guidelines for Protected Area Management Categories – Interpretation and Application of the Protected Area Management Categories in Europe.

IUCN WCPA (July 2000): Evaluating Effectiveness: A Framework for Assessing Management of Protected Areas, Marc Hockings with Sue Stolton and Nigel Dudley

([http://wcpa.iucn.org/pubs/pdfs/Evaluating\\_Effect.pdf](http://wcpa.iucn.org/pubs/pdfs/Evaluating_Effect.pdf))

UNESCO WH: Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention

<http://www.unesco.org/whc/toc/mainf8.htm>

Council of Europe: European Diploma

<http://www.nature.coe.int/english/main/econets/diploma/dipeuroen.htm>

WWF's Rapid Assessment and Prioritisation methodology

(<http://www.panda.org/forests4life/parkassessment/prioritization.pdf>)

EUROPARC Federation: The European Charter for sustainable tourism in protected areas, Parcs naturels régionaux de France (2000) <http://www.europarc.org/international/europarc.html>)

PAN Parks: Verification manual - Certification based on independent verification is the basis of the PAN Parks concept (December 2001) – not published (<http://www.panparks.org/>)