

Many of you have sent me their best wishes not only for the New Year, but especially for a quick and full recovery after I fell seriously ill during a mission in Guinea Bissau (which I survived thanks to my wife). There were many offers to take up on my tasks – from the secretariat, from IUCN-member organisations, and of course from CEM-members. It is good to be part of a large family of conservationists that are also looking after you and take over from you when needed: Angela Andrade, our Deputy Chair wrote a flash report for January; CEM-members Masse Lô and Aissa Regalla together with Pat Hawes (HQ) and Aris El Ousseynou (IUCN-Bissau) made sure that the next steering committee meeting and workshop in Guinea Bissau would go on, etc. I am very indebted to you all. If I missed something due to my illness that is important for CEM, please remind me!

*CEM matters:*

It is with great regret that I have to announce that Eddie Hegerl decided to withdraw from the Steering Committee. In my email to Eddie responding to his withdrawal, I expressed my appreciation for his contributions: *“You have contributed in many ways positively to the CEM-process. That started already in Barcelona, and it went on during the SC-meetings. Your ideas were valuable and we adopted many of them, for instance on the thematic groups to be started. Also your “precautionary approach” when we were going too fast in your opinion, forced us to rethink our plans and improve them during that process.”*

*From the Thematic Groups*

Jelena Ilić from Serbia has agreed to be the young professional co-Thematic Group Lead for the Ecosystem services theme. Jelena has a background in environmental science. She got off to a flying start, giving priority to the improvement of communications with the thematic group members.

Graham Bennett identified the need for IUCN-HQ support in IT-applications for Commissions. In his case it is about connectivity, but similar needs have been identified in other groups like the ecosystems services theme and the nutrient flows theme. It is true that all IUCN-commissions build up their own data bases on practical experiences in their field, lessons learned etc. To that can be added emerging discussion platforms where experiences on applications are exchanged and where views on paradigms emerge, leading to innovative approaches in conservation. This is central to the IUCN-mission and it should be a central facility that supports us in these.

*From the Regions*

I am very impressed with the dynamics of CEM in Northern America since Steve Edwards agreed to be our Regional Vice Chair. I invite you to look at their work as it may be very inspirational for other regions as well. CEM-member Mr. Stamatis Chondroiannis from Greece, has kindly agreed to be IUCN’s representative on the jury to select the next “European Green Capital of the Year”. Stamatis is an architect with extensive experience in landscape planning and cultural restoration. CEM-member John Benson participated recently in a meeting organised by the Commission on Environmental Law (CEL) in Sydney.

*General IUCN matters*

We regularly receive draft papers from Headquarters to comment upon. Most often it is policy position papers and we receive those drafts with a very short time-frame to respond. I am very impressed with Angela Andrade and her groups who always manage to provide constructive answers to these documents, which are highly appreciated by HQ-staff.

CEM representatives: I like to encourage CEM-members to identify themselves as such at occasions where they are involved and it is relevant for our work as a commission. For instance, within the *One Union, One Programme* approach (remember the DG at Barcelona stressing “no more silos”), Commissions are frequently invited to be represented in regional and national IUCN-members meetings. It is not automatically the regional or thematic leadership that will be asked to participate on behalf of CEM. We like to invite different members with the appropriate profile for specific agenda items, or simply members that live nearby. Remember, you are all CEM ambassadors!