

The Precautionary Principle and Environmental Governance: Sustainable Development, Natural Resource Management and Biodiversity Conservation (Leader: Sue Mainka, Species Programme)

This is a joint initiative of IUCN (the Species Survival Commission, Environmental Law Centre, and Regional Office for Southern Africa), ResourceAfrica, Fauna & Flora International and TRAFFIC International. The precautionary principle is a response to uncertainty. It allows for the use of caution when confronted with the threat of harm, despite an absence of scientific certainty as to the likelihood or magnitude of the threat. It has gained prominence in addressing food standards, pollution, toxic chemicals, and conservation, and its compelling logic has led to its progressive consolidation through international environmental hard and soft law. This project focuses on the application of the precautionary principle to biodiversity conservation and natural resource management (NRM). Particular attention is given to the following policy areas where the principle is an important locus of contention:

- sustainable use and trade of timber and wildlife
- fisheries regulation
- protected areas
- invasive alien species

This IUCN 3IC project constituted the inception phase of a three-year project. The overall project has two major aims:

- i. To examine systematically the operation and impact of the precautionary principle in selected policy areas through the development of strategic case studies and a process of regional and international consultation.
- ii. To analyze and present the resulting insights for guidance on best practice.

In the preparatory year the major activities were:

- extensive consultation among IUCN offices and members to gather perspectives and inputs on uncertainty and precaution in NRM/conservation from various regions and sectors;
- development and consultation on a comprehensive Situation Analysis: 'The Precautionary Principle in Biodiversity Conservation and Natural Resource Management';
- substantial communication and dialogue at three international conservation fora: the World Summit for Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, September 2002), the Global Biodiversity Forum held in conjunction with the Vth World Trade Organization Ministerial (Cancun, September 2003), and the Vth IUCN World Parks Congress (Durban, September 2003). At WSSD and at WPC the project held discussion side-events involving presentations from a range of speakers. Reports of these meetings are available at www.pprinciple.net.

The 3IC project finished in December 2003, but was successful in raising further support for another two years of work from the EU (DG-Development).

The situation analysis 'The Precautionary Principle in Biodiversity Conservation and Natural Resource Management' has been further published as issue 2 of the IUCN policy and Global Change Series. An electronic version is available at www.pprinciple.net

At the Third IUCN World Conservation Congress (Bangkok, November 2004) a set of IUCN member organizations involved in the project sponsored a motion on the precautionary principle. Following lengthy debate, a final consensus text was developed and adopted as an IUCN resolution: CGR3.REC008 Applying the Precautionary Principle in Environmental Decision-making and Management. The new resolution calls on IUCN members to develop tools for the effective application of the principle, to investigate its relationship with other principles and to promote a greater understanding of its application and implementation. It calls on IUCN to establish an inter-commission working group and to encourage decision-makers to apply the principle. The full text has not yet been finalized but an informal version is available from <http://www.pprinciple.net>.

The project has also run regional workshops in Africa and South East Asia as part of the fourth sessions of the Global Biodiversity Forum for those regions (Dar es Salaam and Manila, June 2004). Outputs from both workshops are available from the project website: www.pprinciple.net. A workshop for Latin America will take place in Quito in March 2005.

Based on the outcome of these workshops and on contributions from IUCN members and others, the project has collected a series of over 20 case studies, to be published in book form before the end of 2005. The case studies explore responses to uncertainty and precaution across different sectors of NRM and biodiversity conservation, and across different regions and levels (from local to international).

The project also aims to publish a guide for best-practice in the management of uncertainty and implementation of precaution in natural resource management and biodiversity conservation. This will be a shorter publication, aimed at decision-makers.

A final International Workshop is scheduled for July 2005 to synthesize results of regional workshops, review case studies and review best-practice guidance. The project will then conclude in October.

Management and implementation of the project has been in the hands of Barney Dickson (Project Manager) and Rosie Cooney (Project Coordinator) of FFI.