

## **THE FUTURE OF PROTECTED AREAS: ROGER CROFTS**

I warmly welcome the debate stimulated by Mag. Dr Michael Jungmeier as we prepare for the next IUCN World Parks Congress in 2014. This debate is at the centre of teaching and learning at the University of Klagenfurt as part of its outstanding MSc in Protected Areas Management. My commentary is based on reflecting over many years on our successes, but especially on our failures, as we are not sufficiently prepared to learn from our mistakes: surely the ultimate, if somewhat humiliating, exercise!

### **1. We have failed so far!**

We are too complacent in accepting that 10% of the land area and <1% of the sea area protected is a success. A point we celebrated at the 2003 World Parks Congress. This is not success but gross failure: what about the remaining 90% and >99% respectively? Worse, not all protected areas exist in reality and are so called 'paper parks'. Worse still, not all will measure up to the IUCN definition of a protected area, or to its Management Effectiveness Evaluation system. They are subject to political manipulation and reductions in resource allocation, and are the targets of mining companies, agriculturalists and foresters globally and locally.

At least in Europe, the EU has shown the way with the Natura 2000 system which has resulted in better protection of many existing areas and additional areas protected to a very considerable extent.

And, even in the protected areas community there is insufficient agreement on the great variety of protected area types. For instance, are the cultural landscapes of Europe really protected areas? Yes say us Europeans who understand the subtle interplay between society and nature over many centuries and millennia, and the values these represent for our modern society. No say biodiversity specialists from North America as protected areas must be pristine nature. A healthy, but not necessarily productive, debate has ensued.

### **2. So what shall be do?**

Let's warmly welcome Michael's Parks 3, but think even beyond that to Parks 4! Parks 4 is not restricted to protected areas as we do not want to persist with "islands of protection in a sea of devastation". Parks 4 therefore covers all of the land and the sea as it is all important in its own right: nature for nature's sake, and is vital for our human survival for this and following centuries. My vision is for a nature based stewardship of our natural resources and natural systems, to use them sustainably, to understand their limits and carrying capacities, and to leave a worthy inheritance for the future. This means: making sure that protected areas really work to protect and preserve nature's systems and processes, that they are properly buffered against cross boundary activities, and most significantly that all of the land and sea areas are cared for at a higher level of stewardship than at present.

What's needed to achieve Parks 4?

First and foremost, there has to be **political will** directly from politicians internationally, regionally and nationally as a result of pressure from civic society and lobbyists of the need for a new mandate. Recognition of protected areas has to go beyond the CBD, where some key nations are absent. They need to be at the heart of new Millennium Plus Development Goals: it's obvious in terms of soil productivity, breeding and spawning areas, water catchment management etc.

Second, **societal involvement** is essential as people will determine future agendas by the way they influence politicians and by their own attitudes and behaviours. This means improving understanding of the importance of all of the land and sea, and the part which protected areas play for our increasingly urban society. Engagement of younger generations is a key component of this second element. The iACT Dialogues being developed under the IUCN Youth Programme, with involvement inter alia of the Sibthorp Trust, is a case in point to articulate new futures from a younger perspective and expose them to older generations in the hope and expectation of changing the latter's mindset. The outcomes will reported to the 2014 WPC.

Third, the **global corporates** need to be re-aligned to recognise the positive role which they can play is sustaining a business environment without over exploitation of nature. The continuation of the various fora under the umbrella of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, the dialogues with the International Council for Mining and Minerals, need to become positive action for the environment, including protected areas, rather than posturing form rigid positions. Surprisingly, companies like Rio Tinto, have been prepared to move forward in their own operations and others need to follow.

Fourth, we need some **scientific pragmatism**. We know a lot about natural processes and the interactions with humans. But we do not make it available in an understandable or accessible form to managers in protected areas and beyond their boundaries. This should be priority of the academic and consultancy professions. The WCPA Best Practice Guidelines are helpful, but we need more scientists to translate their ideas, knowledge and understanding to everyday use. The ebook on protected areas management being developed in time for the WPC by WCPA experts is a good exemplar for others to follow.

Fifth, we need greater **conservation commonsense**. The conservation movement has n-moved on, but there are still those who wish to turn the clock back to some idyllic past-time. Recognition that this is not achievable because of natural changes and changes in human activities and behaviour is essential. It is not selling the birthright, but recognising that the 'no never' philosophy has rarely won the argument against commercial aspirations and demands.

Sixth, we need to **harness global tourism** so that it does not become even more of a threat to protected areas, especially World Heritage Sites, as part of a "most go to" collector mentality. Deals with tourism companies and their representative bodies to adopt stringent nature centric policies and practices are needed.

Seventh, we need to **move from a consumptive society** to one which will live sustainably within the carrying capacity of the Earth's resources. Previous arguments on the finite level of Earth's resources from the 1960s onwards have always left a legacy of 'it will not happen' and, as a result, they have not been as influential as had been hoped. This does not mean 'sack cloth and ashes' living but one where everyone citizen is mindful of the use of 'waste' through philosophies such as 'reuse, recycle and reduce'. Civic and political leaders at all levels have key roles to play in getting these messages over.

And finally, eighth, we need to develop and implement **new ways of spatial planning**. Too often the boundaries of protected areas are a line on the map and on the ground, easily seen on satellite imagery: the classic examples of protection hard next to devastation. Spatial planning at national and inter-country transboundary levels should recognise the natural flows of water, energy etc across boundaries and the positive, as well as negative, ways of managing these through application of management zones, buffers and corridors.

For those readers who feel that this eight point agenda is far fetched, at least I hope it will stimulate debate and result in new thinking stimulated by Michael Jungmeier's Parks 3 challenge. For those who think that this agenda has nothing to do with protected areas, I ask them to look beyond the core areas and ask why we have so few protected areas and why there are continuing demands for the exploitation of their resources.

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