

Strategic Analysis: SCB and Global Conservation Policy

A Report Prepared for
the Society for Conservation Biology

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Executive Summary

The Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) is a global professional scientific society seeking to advance the science and practice of conserving Earth's biological diversity. Since its founding in 1985, SCB has demonstrated a commitment to using science to inform policy and management decisions. A 2015 Member Survey and SCB's 2016-2020 Strategic Plan both identified a top priority for SCB: promoting greater integration of conservation science into policy and management decisions. In response, SCB's Board of Governors asked the Global Policy Committee to examine how SCB should meet this goal.

SCB engaged Sarah Thomas Consulting, LLC, to conduct a strategic analysis to inform the Board of Governors as it determines how SCB should engage in conservation policy in the future. As a part of the analysis, we interviewed 28 experts representing an array of geographical focus areas, institutions, and SCB affiliations. We then identified findings pertaining to experts' views of SCB's strengths and organizational niche, the preferred scope and scale for SCB's engagement, and possible roles for SCB's future participation in policy. We present the key findings below.

Key Findings

Notwithstanding the broad diversity in their geographical focus areas, institutional representation, and SCB affiliation, the conservation policy experts interviewed for this report agree on many key issues. Of respondents, 76% concur that SCB's **strengths** are its high-quality journals and conferences, and 73% believe that SCB's **organizational niche** is convening interdisciplinary scientists focused on conservation from across the globe. When asked to identify SCB's **weaknesses**, 35% of respondents said that SCB has inadequate global representation, especially from developing countries. Of respondent, 89% believe that SCB should retain its current **scope**—focusing on a broad array of conservation issues—and 76% maintain that SCB should retain and even strengthen its global representation.

Interviewees are split about the preferred **scale** of SCB engagement: half (50%) of respondents want SCB to engage at an international level, while the other 50% maintain that SCB should focus on regional, national, and local levels. These opposing opinions often are linked with differing ideas about the preferred **roles** SCB should play in policy.

Possible Future Roles for SCB in Policy

Respondents identify many possible roles for SCB in policy, which vary in the degree of involvement in advocacy and in the level of coordination required by SCB staff. Interviewees outline the following possible roles:

- 18% of respondents favor SCB engaging in policy through **direct advocacy**.
- 39% of respondents believe that SCB should pursue a **science broker** role in which centralized SCB staff participate in technical advisory bodies or team with environmental organizations.
- 56% of respondents maintain that SCB should pursue a **science liaison** role in which SCB staff help to coordinate and facilitate the inclusion of members' expertise in policy dialogues.

- 39% of respondents support a **networker** role for SCB in which SCB staff help to train and embed SCB members in policy processes and decision-making bodies at all levels.
- 28% of respondents prefer that SCB undertake a **thought leader** role in which SCB leverages members' knowledge and stature to raise, frame, and inform policy discussions through dedicated journal issues, workshops, and/or conference symposium.

Experts recommend that SCB consider the following criteria when determining which role/roles to pursue in policy: 1) The likelihood of impact and success in the roles; 2) The extent to which the roles build on SCB's strengths and organizational niche; and, 3) The alignment of the roles with SCB's mission and capacity. As the Board of Governors decides which roles SCB should play in policy, and at what scale/scales, it would do well to consider the following questions:

- What is the likelihood and level of impact SCB might have in different roles?
- To what extent do the roles build on SCB's strengths and organizational niche?
- To what extent do the roles align with SCB's mission and capacity?
- What are the most strategic scales at which to pursue the roles?
- What changes in SCB's structure, culture, and/or capacity, if any, would be necessary to pursue the roles?
- What further information is needed to evaluate the possibility of pursuing one or several of the identified roles?

Strategic Analysis Introduction

Established in 1985, the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) works to advance the science and practice of conserving Earth’s biological diversity. SCB is a global professional scientific society focused on conservation science. Among its organizational values is the belief that “collaboration among scientists, managers, and policy makers is vital to incorporate high-quality science into policies and management decisions affecting biological diversity.”¹

Throughout its history, SCB’s members and leadership have demonstrated a commitment to the integration of conservation science into policy and management decisions. A 2015 survey of 2,090 SCB members (including both current and past members) identified three priorities for SCB’s future areas of focus: 1) “Enhance collaboration and/or propel dialogue between researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and managers;” 2) “Increase the use of quality science in decision-making and management;” and, 3) “Inform policy and legislation at regional and global levels around the world.”² The Society’s 2016-2020 Strategic Plan echoed these foci, naming SCB’s second strategic focus as working to “increase application of science to management, policy, and education.”³ With this renewed commitment as context, the SCB Board of Governors charged the Global Policy Committee (GPC) with determining how the Society should meet this strategic focus.

Purpose

Led by the GPC, SCB engaged Sarah Thomas Consulting, LLC to undertake a strategic analysis with the purpose of identifying potential future roles for SCB in conservation policy. The specific goals of the strategic analysis are three-fold:

- Describe SCB’s strengths, organizational niche, and weaknesses
- Identify the biodiversity conservation issues, processes, and fora that would most benefit from involvement by SCB and its members
- Outline the most promising roles and scales for SCB engagement in conservation policy

The strategic analysis is intended as a resource for the Board of Governors to determine the best opportunities and strategies for SCB to contribute to conservation policy in the future

¹ “What is SCB.” Society for Conservation Biology. 2016. Web. 10 June 2016. <https://conbio.org/about-scb/who-we-are>

² McKinley Advisors, Society for Conservation Biology: Key Research Findings and Recommendations, 2015, p. 35.

³ 2016-2020 Strategic Plan for the Society for Conservation Biology, 2016, p. 3.

Section I. Methods

This section provides an overview of the three phases of the strategic analysis. In **Phase I - Research Design**, the GPC formed a subcommittee to design and oversee the strategic analysis, as well as to provide feedback at various stages of data collection and analysis. In collaboration with Sarah Thomas Consulting, LLC, the subcommittee developed criteria for selecting interviewees. We also requested feedback from the SCB Board of Governors, section boards and policy committees, working groups, and chapters on specific issues, processes, and fora to examine and potential experts to interview.

Based on feedback from SCB groups, we selected four criteria for choosing experts to interview. These criteria included: 1) broad geographic representation (at least 2 experts based in or actively working in each regional section area); 2) representation from an array of relevant institutions, including universities and research institutions, non-government organizations (NGOs), and funders; 3) roughly equal representation between internal SCB experts and external experts;⁴ and, 4) knowledge of and/or experience with policy fora at different scales. Based on feedback from SCB groups, we developed a survey tool (Appendix A) to conduct 30-minute semi-structured interviews with experts.

In **Phase II – Interviews**, we conducted interviews with national, regional, and international conservation policy experts. Of the 63 experts contacted for interviews, 28 responded and were interviewed between April 1 and June 3, 2016.⁵ These included (see Appendix B for more details):

- *By section*: 6 global; 5 Africa; 4 Latin America and the Caribbean; 3 Marine; 3 Europe; 3 Asia; 2 Oceania; 2 North America
- *By institution*: 14 environmental non-governmental organizations; 9 universities or other research institutions; 3 professional scientific societies; 2 funders
- *By SCB affiliation*: 16 current or former SCB leaders; 12 experts who are SCB members (but not leaders) or who are not affiliated with SCB
- *By gender*: 20 men; 8 women

Phase III – Written Summary consisted of a trend analysis of the interview data and a summary of findings. We developed a format for communicating the findings and eliciting additional feedback from SCB groups. We received input from seven representatives from SCB groups; this feedback is included in Appendix D.

⁴ We defined internal experts as individuals who are current or former members of SCB's leadership (members of the Board of Governors, section presidents, or policy committee chairs); we defined external experts as individuals who may be SCB members (but who are not current or former leaders) or who are not affiliated with SCB.

⁵ It was not within the scope of this project to conduct a statistically representative survey of conservation experts. Instead, we worked within the project timeline and budget to ensure broad representation of experts across geographic regions, topical focus areas, institutional affiliations, and gender to create a strategic analysis that reflects a broad range of informed views.

Section II. SCB's Strengths, Organizational Niche, and Weaknesses

This section provides a summary of the key findings from the interviews with experts regarding SCB's strengths, organizational niche, and weaknesses. It also presents the science needs as outlined by interviewees. Key findings in this section include:

- 76% of respondents view SCB's journals and its conferences—its ability to bring together leading scientists—as its primary strengths.
- 73% of respondents regard SCB's organizational niche as being a trusted source of scientific information on conservation science globally.
- 35% of respondents maintain that SCB is not adequately global in scope in terms of member representation and leadership from developing countries.
- 31% of respondents believe SCB has had limited and/or ineffective engagement with international conservation policy to date.
- 87% of respondents agree on the need for conservation science to inform policy and management decisions at all levels.

SCB Strengths and Organizational Niche

The interviews reveal overwhelming agreement about SCB's strengths, with 76% of respondents mentioning SCB's journals and conferences when asked about SCB's strengths. Interviewees praise the quality of the scientific information presented in journals and at conferences, as well as the conferences' role in convening scientists from all over the world. As a former SCB leader explained, "SCB punches above its weight because of its ability to address broader global issues and because it is a convening place for global scientists - that is its strength." This view aligns with the findings of the 2015 Member Survey in which 83% of members mentioned SCB's strength as being a "trusted source for information and research in the field."⁶ It also is consistent with members' agreement that SCB's "high quality publications and networking opportunities" are the top source of satisfaction among SCB members⁷ and "attending SCB conferences/meetings" is members' top reason for joining SCB.⁸

"SCB punches above its weight because of its ability to address broader global issues and because it is a convening place for global scientists—that is its strength."
--Former SCB Leader

Three-quarters (73%) of respondents see SCB's organizational niche as aligned with its strengths: providing high quality scientific research on an array of conservation issues. While other professional scientific societies occupy a similar niche, SCB holds a comparative advantage in having more of a global reach (compared to national-level ecological societies) due to its membership. As a policy expert at a national-level ecological society stated, "I think SCB has more global scope and is more distributed in its membership than most ecological societies, which does present a real opportunity." When asked about

⁶ McKinley Advisors - Member Survey, p. 24.

⁷ McKinley Advisors - Member Survey, p. 8.

⁸ McKinley Advisors - Member Survey, p. 19.

SCB's organizational niche, 27% also mentioned SCB's broad disciplinary representation as a point of distinction. As a policy expert from an international NGO described, "SCB has a very wonderful ability to be narrow and broad at the same time. Narrow in the sense that the filter for all of the work is conservation, but broad in the fact that natural scientists, economists, and social scientists are all involved."

Weaknesses

When asked to identify SCB's weaknesses, 35% of respondents argue that SCB, despite its structure as a global society, is not sufficiently global in scope either in terms of its membership or its leadership.

These interviewees believe that SCB, including its Board and Executive Office, remain dominated by North Americans and Europeans, a fact that undermines its global perspective. As a former SCB leader and expert at an international NGO explained, "One of the biggest weaknesses remains one of geography ... SCB has not quite worked out the answer to whether it is a North American society or a global conservation society, partly because of the weight of its history which has made it quite hard to bring in equivalent proportions of conservation science communities from elsewhere in the world." Another former SCB leader was more critical, "The main weakness of SCB is that outreach and interaction with the rest of the world, specifically with the developing world, especially in the three sections with the most biodiversity--Asia, Africa, and Latin America--has been limited." Several interviewees believe this weakness hurts SCB's reputation internationally. A former SCB leader observed, "SCB does not have a particularly strong brand and may be perceived to be American even if it is actually international." Moreover, a view exists that the lack of a truly global representation may impede future policy endeavors. As a current SCB leader explained, "If you do not have that global perspective inside everything SCB does, you are not going to have the right channels to pull in the critical mass for key decisions." An expert at a research institution in Latin America, however, posits that the problem is not with SCB but with the field of conservation biology. The expert notes that outside of North America there are "not many graduate programs in conservation biology. In Brazil, for instance, the graduate programs are in pure ecology. So, in many areas of the developing world there are not researchers who see themselves as conservation biologists, but rather as pure ecologists, which has consequences for the way SCB is run and the fact that so much demand comes from the United States and goes in that direction."

"The main weakness of SCB is that outreach and interaction with the rest of the world...especially in the three sections with the most biodiversity—Asia, Africa, and Latin America—has been limited."
--Former SCB Leader

In addition, 31% of respondents, when asked about SCB's weaknesses, note that SCB as an organization (as opposed to its individual members) has little meaningful engagement in international policy, outside of its recent participation in the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Several respondents point to SCB's minimal interaction with international fora, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) as a problem. A former SCB leader noted, "I cannot say how many times I have regretted that SCB has not engaged with CITES and how beneficial its presence would be...individual members are engaging, but to speak of the Society per se is an entirely

different thing than the members.” A policy expert at an international NGO wondered, “Where is SCB engaging at all? I know SCB has done some work at a national level, but I think in terms of international policy it is not engaging that much.”

A subset of respondents maintains that SCB has been fairly ineffective at the international policy work it has pursued, outside of work on IPBES. As one former SCB leader argued, “SCB does not have a good track record of delivering policy-relevant science. We do not have a suite of products to point to and say, ‘This is what we do.’” A current SCB leader concurred, pointing to the high representation of academics in the Society. “We do not understand policy well; very few academics have really been involved in international levels of policy; they do not know how it works or influential ways to act within policy fora.” An expert at an international NGO argued that SCB’s policy efforts had actually undermined its reputation. “There have been occasions, one in particular, when SCB delegations in international meetings have been ignorant of protocols, which definitely caused SCB’s credibility to take a hit as a result.”

“SCB does not have a good track record of delivering policy-relevant science. We do not have a suite of products to point to and say, ‘This is what we do.’”

--Former SCB Leader

Several respondents speculate that SCB’s ineffectiveness may be due to the fact that it has not teamed with other organizations. As an expert at an international NGO explained, “The policy world involves lots of interaction with the NGO community—SCB might be losing a lot because it does not collaborate in those circles.” Another SCB leader concurred, “SCB needs to get away from its focus on individual ownership of efforts and figure out a way to work with other groups and their infrastructure.” A couple of respondents also indicate that SCB’s heavy reliance on volunteers might limit effective policy engagement. A former SCB leader stated, “Volunteers are great, but to have an impact on the policy space will require a more coordinated effort.” Finally, several respondents note that SCB faces a common barrier to science integration that is not specific to the Society: the mismatch of timelines of scientific research compared to policymaking. As an expert at a research institution explained, “The challenge of having science inform policy is that science has a different pace than policy making ... A policy maker wants an immediate answer. As a researcher, I need another 10 years of research to have a good answer. So, it is useful to anticipate the questions that will be on policymakers’ agenda.”

Global Science Needs

Of respondents, 87% believe that decision-making bodies, of all levels, are in need of greater scientific information. As an expert for an international NGO explained, “Science input could be useful at almost any level of decision-making regarding species protection.” Another policy expert working in Africa noted, “Relevant science is always welcome with open arms.” But, a handful of interviewees believe the need is particularly acute in developing countries. As one funder observed, “I am working with Caribbean countries and they have low capacity regarding science. The relevant information is not in the right places, it is not accessible, or it is highly conflicting.”

Of respondents, 40% claim that the strongest need for science is not necessarily in international environmental fora (e.g., CBD), which already receive technical support from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), but in fora not explicitly focused on biodiversity or even on the environment. Interviewees point specifically to the need for more conservation science to inform the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As an expert at an international NGO explained, “SDGs are likely to be a major force in actually affecting change because they are focused on development. UNDP is potentially a place to influence because you need biodiversity and healthy ecosystems to achieve sustainable goals and SCB probably has worthwhile information needed in these conversations.” Two interviewees, a funder and an expert at a regional NGO, also mentioned the need to provide better information to the private sector. As the funder explained, “More focus should be placed on the private sector players because of their powerful economic interests and the potentially significant negative impacts of their activities on biodiversity and the environment in general.”

Of respondents, 27% note the need for better data coordination between scales of decision-making and more predictive models. As one expert with an international NGO stated, “We know biodiversity is declining, but we do not know precisely where and how much we are losing. To make a comparison, when climate change started to be mentioned there was a huge effort to address climate change and predicts its effects. We absolutely do not have that effort in biodiversity. We have no data coordination and, therefore, we have very few tools to predict loss and to develop courses of action.” A former SCB leader agreed, arguing that a major priority of the field and SCB should be “to take a modeling approach to biodiversity loss, particularly in terms of how climate change may affect species.”

Section III. Scope and Scale for SCB Involvement in Policy

This section describes the findings from interviews regarding the preferred scope and scale⁹ for future policy involvement by SCB. Key findings in this section include:

- 89% of respondents believe that SCB should continue to focus on all conservation issues.
- 76% of respondents indicate that SCB should maintain and even strengthen its global scope.
- 50% of respondents want SCB to engage at an international policy level, and 50% maintain that SCB should focus on policy at regional, national, and local levels. Both views are held by respondents from a variety of geographical focus areas, institutions, and SCB affiliations.
- Opinions about the scale of policy engagement are linked, and often confounded, with views on the appropriate role for SCB in policy.

Scope

A strong majority (89%) of respondents believe that SCB should continue to focus on all conservation issues, which is consistent with views about SCB’s strengths and organizational niche. As a former SCB leader and expert at an international NGO stated, “I think SCB should be open to and embracing of all conservation biology spanning across the entire of biodiversity conservation and with the global scope.” However, a subset of interviewees maintain that SCB as an organization (as opposed to its members) might strategically target a few issues areas for focus if it decides to pursue specific policy engagement roles in the future (see Section IV). Interviewees demonstrate fairly strong agreement on the most pressing global biodiversity issues, with habitat loss and degradation ranking first (93%), followed by climate change (67%), and invasive species (41%).

Global Biodiversity Issues Identified by Interviewees

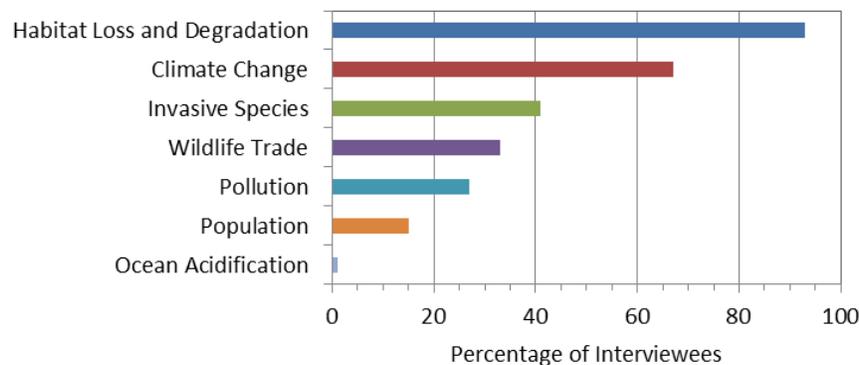


Figure 1. Global biodiversity issues identified by interviewees.

⁹ For this report, we use the term global in reference to SCB’s scope – the geographic representation of its members and the foci of their work across the globe; we use the term international in reference to SCB’s scale of policy engagement – the level of decision-making SCB seeks to influence, whether international (e.g., in multilateral environmental agreements such as CBD), regional (sectional or multi-national), national, and/or local (sub-national).

A strong majority of respondents, 76%, maintain that SCB should retain and even strengthen its global scope by engaging on issues and in fora across the world and by supporting participation from members outside of North America and Europe. As one academic explained, “I think SCB should continue to push its brand that it is a global scientific society with members across the world ... it has a competitive advantage in being so and it will allow people to better link with regional and national processes across the globe where they can affect change.” A former SCB leader argued that SCB needs greater member representation and involvement from developing countries to strengthen its impact on biodiversity issues. “SCB needs to recover the global view ... it should make sure that the best people from anywhere in the world have the space and resources to engage with the organization.” A current SCB leader suggested that SCB might add other offices to better support and reflect efforts in developing countries, stating that “biodiversity hotspots are outside of North America and Europe ... since the Executive Office defines when and how things happen, SCB might need more than one Executive Office for a truly global perspective.”

Scale of Engagement

Strong divergence emerged in the interviews about the most strategic scale for SCB’s engagement in policy. The conflicting opinions are rooted in one or more differing views on the following: 1) the most strategic scale to affect policy change in general; 2) the scale at which SCB could have the most influence given its capacity and organizational strengths; and, 3) the scale of interaction that SCB’s internal structure best supports.

Exactly half (50%) of the respondents, a majority (60%) of whom have direct experience with international fora, believe that SCB should engage at international scales to affect policy and shape global commitments to conservation. They argue that international efforts are the most important for addressing conservation issues. As an expert on policy at an international NGO explained, “It is true that nobody goes to war if you break your CBD commitment, it is a soft forum for change. But, there is also good research that you get better results for conservation when you get country agreements that are made publicly. So, it is worthwhile to have those public commitments and to have them be technically sound.

“It is true that nobody goes to war if you break your CBD commitment, it is a soft forum for change. But, there is also good research that you get better results for conservation when you get country agreements publicly.”

--Policy expert at an International NGO

The other benefit of engagement in international fora is that public donors will align their giving to big public agreements (though not always to the letter).” Another expert at an international NGO agreed, “Even though implementation occurs at the national level, international fora are important for inspiring and guiding countries on important directions.” Other experts maintain that this level of engagement is necessary given the scale of the problems. As an expert at an international NGO stated, “The only way to stop and reverse global drivers is through massive multi-country agreements. These types of problems are only going to get sorted at the high level, anything below that is kind of irrelevant.”

Interviewees also maintain that international-level involvement could make the most of SCB’s global membership and broad geographic expertise. As a current SCB leader stated, “My sense is that SCB’s

niche is that we have a global community of scientists that could mobilize and connect to international processes.” Appendix C presents respondents’ views of the advantages and disadvantages of engaging in specific international fora.

Respondents acknowledge, though, that international engagement needs to be supported by national-level efforts. As a policy expert at an international NGO explained, “In these international fora, A leads to B leads to C leads to D. You cannot just show up at an international meeting because decisions have already been made. If you want to influence an international body, for instance the CBD, you need consistent and sustained engagement at both the national and international levels.” Another expert at an international NGO agreed, “The challenge with the international processes is that

“If you want to influence an international body, for instance the CBD, you need consistent and sustained engagement at both the national and international levels.”

--Policy Expert at an International NGO

implementation happens at the national level or in conjunction with the country that is driving demand. So, you end up using the decisions at the global level to bring governments and companies to the table to act in a less destructive manner.”

The other half (50%) of respondents, 78% of whom have direct experience in international fora, believe that SCB should prioritize national-level and regional engagement as opposed to direct involvement at the international scale. Most of these respondents maintain that organizations (not just SCB) can best advance conservation goals at the national and regional levels, as opposed to the international level. As one former SCB leader

explained, “I have learned, through long engagement in these fora, that the way global agreements are reached is through the participation of influential countries with good arguments. In practice, the country delegations work out policies ... by the time the conversation goes to the international body it is too late. Where you can influence the conversation is through national contact points. These national offices are often short on time and resources and in great need of science information.”

“I have learned, through long engagement in these fora that the way global agreements are reached is through the participation of influential countries with good arguments. In practice, the country delegations work out policies ... by the time the conversation goes to the international body it is too late.”

--Former SCB Leader and Policy Expert

Of the respondents favoring regional and national-level involvement, 56% express doubts in the ability of SCB to influence international fora given its capacity. “I do not see a role for SCB at the international level,” said one former SCB leader and an expert at an international NGO. “It is too small a fish in too big of a pond at that level. I think we are naïve if we believe that we can step into that big arena and have an influence.” Finally, a subset maintains that national and regional engagement better fit with SCB’s organizational structure and strengths. As one academic and SCB leader explained, “To cut to the chase, we are funding policy people at the section level – that is the scale of engagement that makes sense, not putting money into jet-setting to attend global meetings.”

The discrepancy in views about international engagement is consistent with findings from the 2015 Member Survey. On the one hand, members ranked “inform policy and legislation at regional and global

levels around the world” as the third top priority for future areas of focus.¹⁰ Yet, the Member Survey also found that 65% of respondents preferred SCB “grow local networks and partnership to influence policy and management on a regional level” as opposed to the 35% that wanted it to “focus resources to advance policy and protect conservation at the global level.”¹¹

It is worth noting that the preferred scale of SCB policy involvement often has been blurred with the role individuals think SCB should play. The Member Survey, for instance, linked the scale of action (e.g., local versus global) with the specific way SCB should engage (e.g., growing networks and partnership versus advancing policy). Likewise, interviewees’ preference for the scale of SCB involvement was often linked with the activities SCB might undertake. Any future conversation about SCB’s role should carefully distinguish the Society’s role from its scale of involvement.

¹⁰ McKinley Advisors – Member Survey, p. 8.

¹¹ McKinley Advisors – Member Survey, p. 35.

Section IV. Potential Roles for SCB in Policy

In this section, we present findings on the potential roles for SCB in conservation policy as identified by the interviewees. Despite the strong divergence in views about the scale at which SCB should engage, respondents largely agree on the criteria SCB should use to determine which roles to pursue:

- 89% of respondents believe that SCB should engage where and how SCB will have the highest likelihood of impact, especially in light of its available resources.
- 76% of respondents maintain that SCB should participate in policy in ways that build on SCB's strengths and organizational niche.
- 57% of respondents argue that SCB's involvement in policy should align with SCB's core mission and its current capacity.

Below we present summaries of the different roles that respondents suggest as potential strategic directions for SCB. Many respondents indicate that it is possible for SCB to play more than one role and for SCB to play the same role at multiple scales.

Role#1: Policy Advocacy

Only 18% of respondents favor SCB engaging in policy through direct advocacy (i.e., lobbying for specific commitments, priorities, resolutions, and policies at the international level). Their vision is to have an assigned SCB global staff member to undertake this role. A subset of respondents emphasizes their preference for international advocacy, as they believe that focusing on one country is not in line with the global scope of the organization. The interviewees also mention the possibility of SCB staff creating position statements or advocacy letters to decision-makers in support of or in opposition to specific policies.

Respondents outline the following **policy advocacy** roles SCB could undertake:

- Hire a policy director to participate in one or more fora at the international level
- Target funding at the section levels to hire policy staff to engage in lobbying at regional or national levels

In contrast, 53% of respondents directly oppose SCB's undertaking policy advocacy. These respondents raise four major objections to having SCB play this role. First, many insist that biodiversity-focused conventions (e.g., CBD, CITES) at the international level are highly populated and that little likelihood exists of influencing debates. As an expert at an international NGO argued, "SCB is arrogant and stupid if it thinks it can be an international driver of policy. Organizations like the World Wildlife Fund and the Wildlife Conservation Society have budgets in the hundreds of millions with full-time staff working on policy. How is SCB going to do that without a major increase in size? Why would people listen?" Second, interviewees note that many of these conventions are highly politicized and that lobbying in these fora might undermine SCB's credibility as a science organization. As a policy expert at an international NGO explained, "CITES, for instance, is extremely populated and it is a classic case where the ethical and scientific issues are completely confused. If SCB went into CITES it would have to do so in a really thoughtful manner so as not to damage its credibility." Third, interviewees doubt that policy advocacy

fits with SCB's mission. As a current SCB leader and policy expert at an international NGO explained, "We want policies to reflect our values, but SCB is not the right mechanism for making policies. We are not an NGO; we are a scientific organization." Finally, interviewees emphasize that to be effective, engagement in policy advocacy requires significant and sustained resources, which SCB does not currently have.

Role #2: Science Broker

Of respondents, 39% believe that SCB should pursue a science broker role, in which SCB staff participate on technical advisory bodies or partner with environmental organizations to contribute scientific expertise to policy discussions and implementation. The vision is for a SCB staff member to be the point person who would cultivate relationships and work directly with NGOs or technical committees to share members' expertise. Respondents believe that such an active role is necessary to actually insert relevant science into policymaking. As an expert at a regional NGO explained, "It is not enough to create the science or write the paper; you have to have someone go to the decision-maker and say, 'Here. Read this.'" Even better, the expert explained, is "anticipating future policy discussions and working to answer the question, then providing the information to decision-makers as the topic arrives on the policymakers' agenda." According to respondents, such a role might also allow SCB to leverage other organizations' infrastructure to influence policy formulation and implementation. As an expert at an international NGO stated, "The key moving forward might be to figure out where we can have a larger impact given our niche, and where we can piggyback on others' efforts." Moreover, several respondents believe that dedicated staff is necessary for such a function. As a former SCB leader noted, "SCB most definitely should have a coordinated approach to policy ... and a person who is going to push forward the impact and expertise of the Society in policy."

A concern exists, however, that having centralized policy staff could narrow and skew the conservation discussions in which SCB engages, as several respondents believe occurred when SCB had a policy director focused on North America. As a former SCB leader cautioned, "It is a very slippery slope because it [a centralized SCB role] depends on the way it occurs ... in the sense that the agenda can end up being what one individual thinks is important and urgent."

Respondents outline the following **science broker** roles SCB could pursue:

- Collaborate with environmental NGOs and other organizations that are strong in advocacy or other components of the policy system (e.g., communications) and provide them with up-to-date scientific information on key issues in support of their advocacy at international and/or national levels
- Serve on science advisory boards or technical committees at the international level; request feedback from members' on issues at relevant times
- Assist with the development of monitoring protocols for national implementation of international commitments
- Meet with targeted groups (e.g., IUCN, UNDP) to determine if and how SCB could support their analytical capacities

- Cultivate relationships with national focal points/offices for international conventions to provide info-graphics, policy briefs, and other policy-relevant science
- Direct funds to sections to hire policy staff to develop relationships with regional and national decision-making bodies and provide them with policy-relevant science

Role #3: Science Liaison

Of respondents, 56% think that SCB should pursue a science liaison role in which SCB staff help to coordinate and facilitate members' expertise into policy dialogues, but do not participate directly.

These interviewees believe that the most strategic use of SCB's strengths is for SCB staff to alert members to policy discussions, to collate scientific information, and to provide behind-the-scenes logistical support for members who want to insert science into policy discussions. As one SCB leader argued, "Anything that happens with policy will be more effective if it is empowering the members and the leadership across all levels to be effective in whatever level that they can engage, instead of the mothership taking control and saying how policy will occur on behalf of its membership." Another current SCB leader agreed, "SCB members are knowledgeable people and SCB has connections to experts beyond members. The goal should be to connect the broader community of scholars from diverse backgrounds to these policy debates, so that they are informed by science." A policy expert at an international NGO also favored such a role, "SCB could be the glue to get members' and scientists' comments and feedback on key policy decisions in international fora."

Four respondents, though, maintain that it SCB might encounter challenges in playing a liaison role. As a current SCB leader explained, "It would be valuable for SCB to have a policy officer to coordinate and disseminate information from members, but it is difficult to reach out and get responses. I already receive 50 to 100 emails monthly of importance on conservation topics and I do not have the time to read them let alone respond to them. It may be hard to engage members who are doing policy in a volunteer capacity."

Respondents outline the following **science liaison** roles that SCB could play:

- Coordinate efforts to respond to international bodies' requests for comments by eliciting and collating responses from members
- Track agendas and policy windows of one or two international conventions (e.g., CBD), monitor and digest the most critical information, and disseminate the information to SCB members
- Use the policy office to distribute member-driven alerts on policy conversations and mobilize relevant members to participate in those discussions
- Organize members' efforts to monitor countries' implementation of international commitments and whether the goals are being achieved
- Collate up-to-date scientific information on pressing conservation issues, particularly in developing countries, and make it available on the website

Role #4: Networker

Of respondents, 39% support a networker role for SCB, in which it helps to train and embed SCB members in policy processes, advisory committees, and decision-making bodies at all levels. The view is that SCB staff should coordinate trainings and networking events to help give members the skills and resources to participate effectively in decision-making bodies. As a former SCB leader explained, “If SCB could facilitate science into decision-making at every level, and if those people are recognized as having been trained and groomed by SCB, then SCB starts to gain credibility and influence in the policy space. So, it could play a training, facilitating, and empowerment role.” Another former SCB leader concurred, “Providing the means and wherewithal for younger researchers to work with policymakers ... would pay-off very strongly in what we could understand about policy and in what relationships we develop with national decision-making bodies.” No respondent mentioned concerns about SCB pursuing such a role.

Respondents outline the following **networker** roles SCB could perform:

- Provide trainings for SCB members on how to identify and cultivate scientists for decision-making positions, including trainings on science communication
- Sponsor fellowships for younger scientists to participate with policy makers, whether at national legislative offices or at international fora (similar to the Smith Fellows Program in the United States and the Policy Internship Program supported by the British Ecological Society in the United Kingdom)
- Promote SCB members’ existing efforts in IPBES, where SCB is recognized and has a voice; facilitate greater representation and participation in IPBES by members from Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa
- Support the cultivation of relationships between SCB members and international, regional, and/or national decision-making bodies to provide policy briefs and other policy-relevant science

Role #5: Thought Leader

Of respondents, 28% think SCB should serve as a thought leader by using its members’ knowledge and stature to raise and frame policy discussions. In this role, SCB staff could coordinate with journal editors or conference committees, as well as relevant member experts, to create high-profile discussions with world-caliber scientists on pressing biodiversity issues. According to respondents, this role would involve the efficient use of SCB’s existing infrastructure—its conferences and journals—to raise awareness about key conservation topics, to frame and push the international debates on these issues, and to make the science case for addressing them. They also maintain that this role maximizes both members’ expertise and SCB’s reputation as a leader in conservation science. As a policy expert at an international NGO argued, “Transformational thought processes about conservation are really important ... they shift the thinking from incremental improvements to conservation to fundamental change. Big thinkers and high-profile journals can play a huge role here. SCB clearly makes sense in this space.” A policy expert at an international NGO agreed, “Scientists should not just describe the implications of policy decisions, saying ‘Oh this is terrible and here are the effects.’ They need to make the case of how and why countries can and should change their actions. SCB is in a position to do so by

identifying key issues and undertaking multiple joint research projects that provide an alternative vision of the future.” No respondent articulated opposition to such a role.

Respondents outline the following **thought leader** roles that SCB could play:

- Dedicate journal issues to specific conservation topics (e.g., the effects of hydropower on biodiversity); as a part of the effort, raise key biodiversity questions pertaining to the available scientific science, recruit SCB member experts across geographical focus areas to contribute to discussions on the topic; frame research needs and outline viable alternatives that are less destructive to biodiversity
- Convene high-profile science panels on conservation topics, particularly topics that might be addressed by international fora in upcoming years or biodiversity issues that pertain to Sustainable Development Goals. Publish reports from the panels and post the discussions on YouTube
- Identify conservation topics of urgency but with little supporting scientific inquiry. Convene experts familiar with the literature and develop policy briefs for decision-makers outlining the problem, existing scientific knowledge, and policy issues for consideration
- Select key conservation topics, undertake joint research projects, and present evidenced-based arguments for why countries can and should undertake biodiversity-protection measures

Section V. Conclusion and Next Steps

Despite broad diversity in their geographic focus, institutional representation, and SCB affiliation, the conservation policy experts interviewed for this report demonstrate strong alignment on a number of key issues. Experts agree that SCB's **strengths** are its high-quality journals and conferences, and that its **organizational niche** is bringing together interdisciplinary scientists focused on conservation from across the globe. In terms of SCB's **weaknesses**, a minority of respondents believe that SCB has inadequate global representation, especially from developing countries, and that its policy engagement in international fora has been limited or ineffective. Experts also concur that SCB should retain its current **scope**—focusing on a broad array of conservation issues—and that it should retain and even strengthen its global representation.

Strong divergence, however, exists in two areas. First, interviewees are evenly split about **scale**—whether SCB should participate in policy at the international level or whether it should focus its efforts at the regional, national, and local levels. These opposing opinions often are linked with ideas about the preferred **roles** SCB should play in policy. Respondents describe many possible roles for SCB in policy, which vary in the degree of involvement in advocacy and in the level of coordination required by SCB staff.

Finally, most interviewees believe that decisions regarding a future policy role for SCB should be guided by one or more of the following **criteria**: 1) Have a high likelihood of impact and success; 2) Build on SCB's strengths and organizational niche; and, 3) Align with SCB's mission and capacity.

In light of the findings of this report, we recommend that SCB consider the following questions as it determines which roles SCB might play in policy in the future and at what scale/scales:

- What is the likelihood and level of impact SCB might have in different roles?
- To what extent do the roles build on SCB's strengths and organizational niche?
- To what extent do the roles align with SCB's mission and capacity?
- What are the most strategic scales at which to pursue the roles?
- What changes in SCB's structure, culture, and/or capacity, if any, would be necessary to pursue the roles?
- What further information is needed to evaluate the possibility of pursuing one or several of the identified roles?

Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Tool

Introductory Script

Thank you again for taking the time to answer these questions. The goal of this project is to formulate recommendations for the Society for Conservation Biology regarding its future engagement in conservation policy issues, processes, and fora. The information gained from the interviews will be synthesized in a strategic analysis, which will be used by the SCB Board of Governors to determine SCB's role in conservation policy moving forward. As I mentioned, the interview is confidential. I will not attribute any comment you make to you or your organization.

Interview questions

1. In your opinion, what are the most pressing global biodiversity conservation issues?
2. Which international or regional processes and/or fora are best for addressing these issues?
 - a. How are non-governmental organizations able to contribute to these processes and/or fora?
 - b. Which would benefit the most from additional external scientific knowledge?
3. What do you see as SCB's unique niche?
 - a. What are its strengths and weaknesses?
4. What criteria do you think SCB should consider as it determines where and how to engage in conservation policy in the future?
 - a. Which conservation issues do you think SCB should work to address and how? At what scale?
 - b. In what processes and/or fora might SCB's involvement have the greatest impact (bearing in mind the size and capacity of SCB)?
 - c. What is SCB's current capacity to participate meaningfully in the ways you mentioned? If capacity is limited, what additional resources would SCB need to participate?*
5. Is there something the previous questions did not cover that you think is useful to share regarding SCB's future engagement in conservation policy?
6. Is there anyone else you suggest we contact for an interview?

**Asked of interviewees who are current or past SCB leaders*

Appendix B: Profile of Interviewees

Interviewees by Geographic Focus

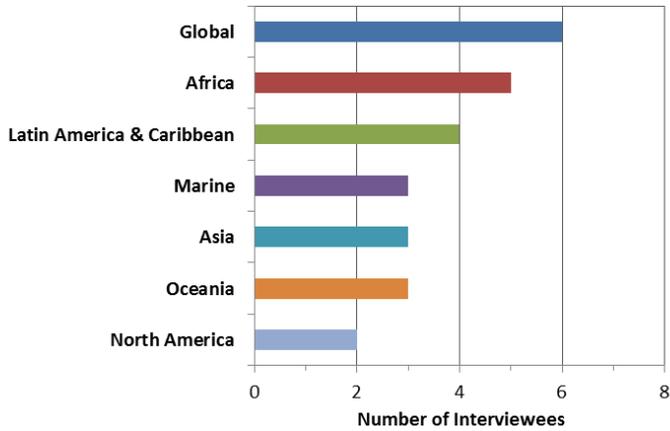


Figure B-1. Interviewees by Geographic Focus.

Interviewees by Institution

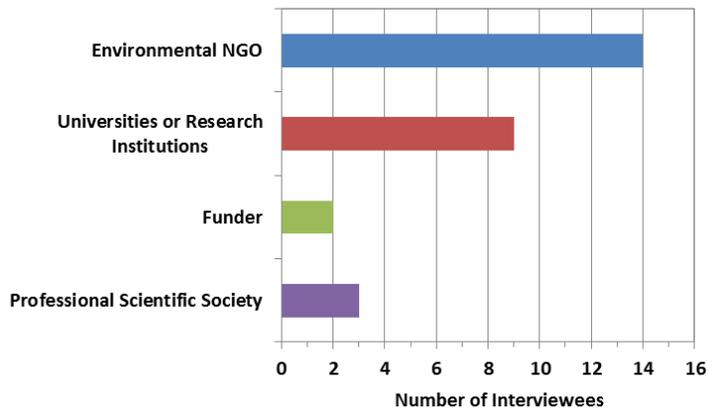


Figure B-2. Interviewees by Institution.

Interviewees by SCB Affiliation

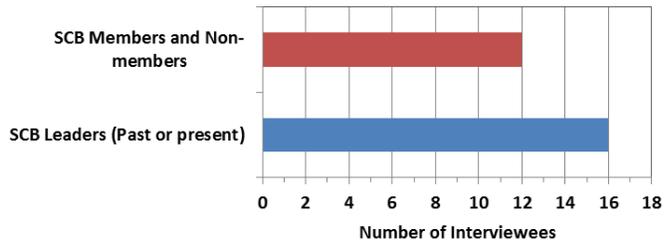


Figure B-3. Interviewees by SCB Affiliation.

Interviewees by Gender

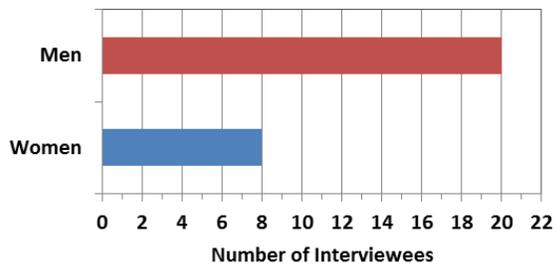


Figure B-4. Interviewees by Gender.

Appendix C: International Fora and Groups for Potential SCB Engagement*

Fora & Groups	Advantages of Engagement	Disadvantages of Engagement
CBD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Focuses explicitly on biodiversity ➤ Inspires and guides countries actions ➤ Funders often align with its commitments ➤ Opportunity for national-level engagement through national contact offices ➤ Promising mechanism for engagement through CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technological Advice that drives agenda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Effective engagement may require action at international and national levels ➤ Highly populated space with little room for engagement ➤ Highly politicized space where countries make decisions
Convention on Desertification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Deals significantly with land degradation, a major driver of biodiversity loss ➤ A powerful convention on par with CBD ➤ May bring greater enforcement for decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Few resources ➤ Not directly focused on biodiversity ➤ No interviewees mention direct experience with the Convention
CITES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Targeted focus ➤ Science purported to be better integrated than in other MEAs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Highly populated space with little room for engagement ➤ Highly politicized space ➤ Potentially narrow focus
IPBES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Aligned with SCB mission in synthesizing and collating scientific information ➤ SCB already a recognized member ➤ Where science-policy interface will be defined in the next decade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Early stage with its influence unclear and unproven ➤ Does not make decisions
IUCN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Provides scientific support to COPs ➤ Observer organization in UN General Assembly ➤ Mechanisms for individual involvement through commissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Already heavily staffed with technical experts ➤ Does not make decisions
UNDP- Sustainable Development Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implementation will have a huge bearing on biodiversity ➤ Great need for science to inform decisions ➤ Chance to integrate biodiversity across silos ➤ Opportunity to expand audience outside of “the choir” focused on biodiversity needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Little clarity among interviewees about means of engagement

*Please note, the information presented in the table consists of interviewees’ subjective opinions and experiences with these fora and groups.