

Chair report for General Meeting of European Sustainable Use Group on 31 May 2023

It has been a long four years since the European Sustainable Use Group met in Karlovac, Croatia at the Aquatika-Karlovac Freshwater Aquarium, kindly and expertly organised by Viktor Šegrt. The world and especially Europe are in a different place. There have been three big upheavals since then, the Covid-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine (although this really started much earlier) and Brexit. Brexit turned out to be the least of these three.

Firstly, I would like to mention our two esteemed ESUG members who have passed away since Karlovac: Professor Dr Evgeny Bragin in 2020 and Professor Basil Manos in 2021. [Please join me in remembering them both.](#)

The COVID-19 pandemic, declared in early 2020 was wide reaching and disrupted, amongst other things, the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Marseille, which was postponed until 2021. In a sign of things to come, many attended online. Our normally scheduled AGM would have been in the spring of 2021, when there were still restrictions due to Covid-19. The effects of Covid-19 and the resulting pandemic or global health emergency are still with us, but we are all happy to be meeting again and look forward to resuming a two-year schedule for our AGMs. Finally, February 24th, 2022, brought the conflict in Ukraine front and centre, with the unimaginable Russian invasion. Tetiana Gardashuk, ESUG committee member in Ukraine, has remained in her home country since then and has been active in on researching the war-environment interaction and the methodology of environmental peacebuilding. She will present on this at the AGM.

I was kindly elected Chair by ESUG members in Karlovac, with Robert Kenward looking forward to retirement from his stint as Chairman of ESUG. The idea was for him to have more time to do other things. I am not sure that has really worked out as he provides me with so much advice and guidance and is still helping to steer the ship. He has, over these four years, faced serious health concerns of his own and thankfully come out on the other side. I am so grateful for all his support and his friendship. It would be remiss not to mention that Robert was awarded the title Member Emeritus of CEM this past year – a well-deserved honour. Of course, he is not one to rest on any laurels and is now actively working on a plan for developing further ESUG's Decision Support Tool. Developments are ongoing with ESUG, Anatrack, UKCEH (United Kingdom Centre for Ecology and Hydrology), GWCT (incorporating Farmer Clusters and the Environmental Farmers Group) and IAF to pull together the decision support tools we have planned to include in our networks from their inception. Robert will report on this further at our AGM.

Many ESUG members are involved in the ongoing development of the Global Naturalalliance system. This work continues with SUME, the group for Sustainable Use and Management of Ecosystems, and SULi. This system now includes 43 languages – Belarusian added this year - and more recently a page based on the Assessment on Sustainable Use of Biodiversity developed by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Development continues with other networking systems, with Michael Greshake and others at work on revitalising Perdixnet and Janusz Sielicki developing IAF's Conservation Portal, pulling together the networks developed through IAF support.

On the policy front, many ESUG members have been actively involved in reviewing recent IPBES assessments – particularly those involving sustainable use. Work on the IPBES second-order draft on Sustainable Use was led by Robert Kenward and complemented by Shane Mahoney of SULi in 2021. Julian Mühle (supported by IAF and Anatrack) attended Plenary 9 of IPBES in Bonn, supporting SUME

and SULi members. Julian was particularly crucial to ensuring that, based on the final chapters in the report, recreational harvest of terrestrial animals was rated in an important summary table as sustainable, rather than slightly unsustainable. More recently Robert and Alexandra Kalandarishvili collated responses to the First order draft of the thematic assessment of the interlinkages among biodiversity, water, food, and health (what is referred to as the Nexus assessment).

Two large EU-funding applications have been undertaken since 2019, both steered by Stratos Arampatzis and his team at Tero, including Olympia Papadopoulou and Dimitra Manou. The first of these was RE-BIO – which was submitted in early 2021. It set out an ambitious programme to provide advice, sensors for monitoring, building an adaptive decision support system and bringing stakeholders together. A series of case studies was designed around bottom-up restoration and scaling up across landscapes. The call was extremely competitive and RE-BIO was unsuccessful. A second bid, Pro-Coast, was submitted in early 2022. Its goal is to empower local communities to support biodiversity conservation across Europe, through community driven initiatives which benefit both biodiversity and livelihoods and leverage private investment to help fund the required actions. As the name suggests, the projects involved are in the coastal ecosystem – in some ways a departure for ESUG. Pro-Coast was ranked highly and is on a list of alternate projects that may still get funded. Stratos will provide further information at the AGM and highlight other funding opportunities to consider in the future.

ESUG's legal standing under Belgian law required some attention since our last AGM. Paperwork, some quite confusing, needed to be filed with the Belgian authorities. And it was not straightforward, requiring two submissions to get everything correctly filed – after one page of the first submission was signed in the wrong place. This prompted many calls from myself and Robert for committee members (Tetiana Gardashuk, David Scallan, Zenon Tederko, Viktor Šegrt, Sándor Csányi, Frank Vorhies) to forward identity information. I thank the committee for their patience while we persevered in the face of bureaucracy. We could not have done this without the help of Charlotte Nyffels, Thiviya Thivakaran and David Scallan of FACE and very many thanks to them. The effort was well worth it. We were able to apply for and obtain IUCN non-governmental organisation status. Struggles with our Belgian bank then ensued, which required more documentation from committee. This has now been satisfactorily resolved. I thank Corinne Duggins at GWCT for help with phone calls to various bank and other officials.

The keen-eyed of you will note that we had hoped to apply to IUCN as an international NGO. As we began the process of application it became obvious that IUCN would not accept that we are an International NGO (hence with 2 votes) because, although we have notional offices also in Japan and UK, we do not have legal presence in those countries. It may be possible, if funding allows, to address this concern in the future.

Currently ESUG membership stands at 135, with 61 members of SULi and 42 members of SUME.

I am sure that ESUG members would wish me to thank our Patrons, The British Association for Shooting and Conservation, together with FACE, Robin Sharp and Anatrack. It is only through their support that we have managed to carry on since 2019.

Dr Julie Ewald (26 May 2023)