

Independent Scientific and Technical Advisory Panels

What are Independent Scientific and Technical Advisory Panels?

Independent Scientific and Technical Advisory Panels (ISTAPs) are a valuable tool to address controversial conservation and development issues with the aim of producing scientifically-robust and equitable solutions. While an ISTAP approach demands an objective perspective, it also links independent scientists, the private sector, governments, financial institutions and NGOs in helping find solutions to challenging issues.

ISTAPs are established with the formal designation of a group of experts, who engage in a set of pre-defined activities to provide scientific and/or technical advice on a specific biodiversity conservation or natural resource management issue. Typically, the recipient of the advice is one or more business entities or public authorities.

The benefits of the ISTAP approach are many, and range from fostering a deeper understanding of the issues among the stakeholders to the successful adoption of new biodiversity measures and practices.

Why does IUCN support ISTAPs?

With its global constituency of government and NGO members, expert Commissions consisting of more than 16,000 scientists and practitioners, and nearly 1,000 staff working around the world, IUCN is well-placed to convene ISTAPs on a wide range of issues. During the past 10 years, IUCN has gained considerable experience using ISTAPs to resolve critical issues, and developed a set of practical models for delivering this advice.

Examples of IUCN's experience in convening and managing ISTAPs include:

- IUCN-Holcim Independent Experts Panel
- IUCN-Niger Delta Panel
- Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel
- Yemen LNG Independent Review Panel
- Independent Panel on Oil and Gas Activities in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF ISTAPs

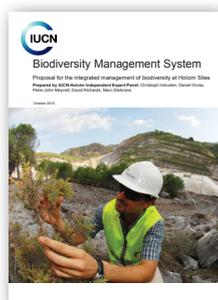
- Composed of individuals with the expertise and competency to critically evaluate all relevant evidence and provide recommendations for solutions to challenging issues, ISTAPs offer evidence-based advice.
- ISTAPs are set up to allow Panel members to gather and consider scientific and technical evidence, and to reach and disseminate their conclusions independent from any external influence, including that of the intended recipient of the advice.
- The scope of an ISTAP's enquiry is focused on a set of specific, pre-defined conservation and natural resource management questions, and the process is time-bound.
- ISTAP members bring a wealth of expertise from different disciplines, and they are expected to consider all evidence strictly from a technical/scientific point of view.
- Panel members work with all relevant stakeholders and be willing to consider evidence from a diversity of disciplines and perspectives.

What are the benefits of ISTAPs?

As some of the outcomes from recent panels that IUCN has led illustrate, ISTAPs are having a significant impact for business and conservation.

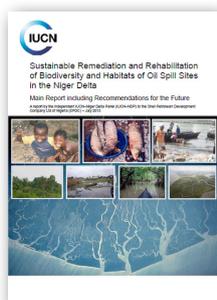
Changing business practices – the Holcim experience

At the request of the cement giant Holcim, an independent expert panel was first formed by IUCN to provide input on the company's biodiversity conservation policy. The result, however, was that two new monitoring tools were developed, which have since been shared with other companies in the cement and aggregates sector. Over a seven-year period, the panel created a Biodiversity Management System (BMS) and a Biodiversity Indicators Reporting Systems (BIRS), which allowed the company to systematically integrate and monitor biodiversity in its business operations. Throughout the process, careful attention was paid to delivering practical recommendations. The independence of the panel, along with the strong conservation and scientific perspectives of its members, were critical to its success.



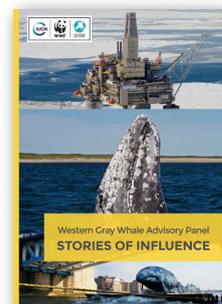
Safeguarding ecosystems and livelihoods in the Niger Delta

IUCN has supported an ISTAP in the Niger Delta since 2012. At the request of Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Ltd., IUCN established a panel to provide science-based recommendations for the remediation and rehabilitation of biodiversity and habitats of oil spill sites in the Delta. The panel's main objective is to improve biodiversity conservation and conditions for the local people, who are dependent on the health of the Delta for their livelihoods. In 2013, the panel produced its first report, which provided a framework for the sustainable remediation of oil spills in the Delta. Further work included a plan to safeguard the remaining areas of biodiversity and building capacity with local Nigerian organizations. Robust science-based standards, guidelines and best practices have been identified, and the panel is now focused on creating long-term indicators to assess the implementation of these recommendations.



Reconciling species conservation and oil and gas development in Sakhalin

In response to widespread concerns about the critically endangered western gray whale, Sakhalin Energy asked IUCN to convene an independent panel to evaluate the company's planned approach for minimizing its impacts in the vicinity of Sakhalin Island, Russia, where these whales are known to breed and feed at certain time of the year. Following this initial ad hoc engagement in 2004, Sakhalin Energy invited IUCN to convene a long-term panel, which could strengthen the science and monitoring of the whales. The Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel (WGWAP) has since met 16 times to develop recommendations for Sakhalin Energy, which helps ensure that the company complies with the lenders' requirements. In addition, the WGWAP has contributed to the standardization and cross-verification of photo-identification databases of the whales, as well as a joint population analysis to estimate abundance and trends. During this period, Sakhalin Energy has also integrated more robust scientific research and monitoring elements into its annual work programme, including measures to minimize the impacts of seismic surveys.



“IUCN has shown that independent scientific panels are an effective mechanism to arrive at evidence-based and robust solutions to some of today’s pressing environment and development challenges.”

– IUCN Director General Inger Andersen

For more information about ISTAPs, please contact IUCN’s Business and Biodiversity Programme at biobiz@iucn.org