

CONSERVATION SCIENCE IN OCEANIA

Society for Conservation Biology Oceania 2019-2020 report



Introduction to Oceania Section Strategy

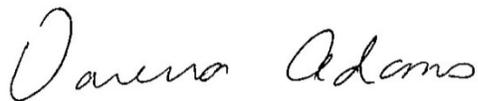
The Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) is a global community of professional conservation scientists and practitioners. The SCB has grown tremendously since it was founded in 1985. A major strategic initiative identified in 1999 led to the establishment of regional sections, and the evolution of SCB into an international society.

The SCB Oceania was created as part of this strategic initiative and has been functioning as a regional section of SCB with an elected independent board since 2005. The SCB Oceania region has five sub-regions, reflecting human cultures and colonisation: Australia, Melanesia, Micronesia, New Zealand and Polynesia. In the past five years SCBO, among other activities, has: doubled its membership (250 members 2013 – 500 members 2018); held very successful conferences every two years (Darwin 2012; Suva 2014; Brisbane 2016; Wellington 2018); grown our regional chapters from 3 to 7; continued to support and grow the regional journal *Pacific Conservation Biology*, including a memorandum of understanding with CSIRO publications; and published conservation science statements (Weeks et al. 2016, PCB) and regional priorities (Weeks and Adams 2018, Conservation Biology).

SCBO has revised its strategic plan (Conservation Science in Oceania, 2018-2023) to build the impact of our Society in our region and to grow the programs and services we deliver to our members. The plan provides strategic direction, implementation guidance and high-level parameters to guide SCB-Oceania's work through annual work plans for the two main committees: Science and Education and Policy.

The SCB Oceania currently has ~300 members around the region. Together this community of conservation professionals is working to advance the science and practice of conserving the Earth's biological diversity. By achieving the goals and objectives articulated in this plan, we believe we will enhance the impact of conservation science in pursuit of our mission.

This year was marked with significant local to global challenges, including the Australian megafires that negatively impacted ecological and human communities alike, the global coronavirus pandemic, anti-racism black lives matter movements around the world, and many other significant events. These have impacted the type of business and activities we have undertaken this year, but also revealed our resilience and community spirit.



Dr Vanessa Adams (President 2017 – 2020)

on behalf of the SCB Oceania Board, July 2020

About SCB Oceania

SCB Oceania (SCBO) is a regional semi-autonomous section of the global Society of Conservation Biology. While the SCBO Strategic Plan is broadly based on the SCB Global Strategic Plan, we have adapted this plan, incorporating aspects of relevance to the Oceania region, its biological communities, and its human cultures.

SCB-Oceania Mission, Vision, & Values

A clear mission, vision for the future, and explicit values are critical to an organisation's accountability, integrity, and effectiveness.

SCB Global Mission Statement

The Society of Conservation Biology advances the science and practice of conserving the Earth's biological diversity.

SCB-Oceania Vision

We promote effective conservation in Oceania, underpinned by science. We achieve our vision by:

- Promoting, performing, and synthesising conservation science;
- Collaborating with governments, managers, conservation organisations, and communities;
- Improving the capacity of local communities to engage in conservation; and
- Influencing policy and management of biological diversity and ecosystems with conservation science and practice.

SCB Oceania Organisational Values

The SCB and its members share the following common values:

1. A commitment to sustainability, recognising its importance for the long-term viability of human societies and environments.
2. The value of biodiversity – including ecological complexity – and evolutionary processes necessary to support all species including our own.
3. Human-caused extinctions in Oceania must decrease, particularly those caused directly or indirectly by ecosystem loss or degradation, overharvesting, climate change, invasive species, pollution, and disease.
4. Maintaining and restoring biodiversity is the responsibility of all people and their governments.
5. Improving the scientific knowledge base and building capacity of people in different communities and countries is critical to influencing decision-making.
6. The sciences, especially conservation sciences, perform a vital role in promoting understanding of the natural world and how human societies and actions can both positively and negatively affect it.
7. Policy and management decisions that affect biodiversity should be based on scientific evidence.

SCB-Oceania Goals and Objectives

We have one organisational goal (increased capacity) and two programmatic goals (Science and Education; Policy and Management). These goals aim to focus our efforts to effect change by increasing regional coverage and influence of conservation research and enhancing the use of that science in management, education, and policy.

The activities under each goal, detailed in the workplan for each year, will track our progress each year of the Strategic Plan, 2018-2023. This annual report details achievements against the annual workplan for the period July 1, 2019– June 30, 2020.

ORGANISATIONAL GOAL

- **Increased Capacity:** SCB Oceania can increase its effectiveness by operating as a coordinated and coherent group that provides essential information relevant to our two major conservation programme goals. We find ways to increase our impact and role through communication mechanisms and through coordinated action by our members. We deliver meaningful scientific content and networking opportunities to our membership through mechanisms such as Conferences, associated workshops and short courses, and chapters. Our member expertise is expanded across a broad range of conservation areas to promote, support, and undertake conservation in our region. This is done by building our funding base and providing useful science and information, both of which help improve conservation outcomes.

PROGRAMME GOALS

- **Conservation Science and Education:** Scientific research and knowledge is essential for understanding systems for conservation and informing policy, management, and education. Conservation science and related activities of our members – as well as others working in this area – support conservation action. Communicating science through education and capacity building programs, allow communities to understand the ecosystems, how they work, and what threatens them and enables them to better conserve them.
- **Policy:** Conservation and development policies significantly affect the long-term viability of ecosystems and their dependent organisms and processes. Science and its information are fundamental for evidence based policies produced by government and other organisations. Dissemination of policy-relevant conservation information, including responses to government and community initiatives that may positively or negatively benefit the environment are a focus for our engagement.

I. Capacity

Goal

SCB-Oceania is recognised in the Oceania region for its role in conservation science and its impact on effective conservation. We encourage membership and active involvement, which allows us to increase our influence in our focus areas. SCB builds and maintains the organisational capacity necessary to operate.

Rationale and Strategic Impact

For effective input into conservation outcomes in our region, we must be recognised as credible by key decision-makers, potential partners, and the public. At the most basic level, powerful constituencies, interest groups, and institutions should look to us as a source of sound information that will help them resolve conservation problems. We will increase our interaction and effectiveness with the media, built on useful products from our key programme areas. We will have adequate capacity and direction. We will also focus on building reliable funding sources, an adequate operating reserve, committed and skilled staff, sound business practices, and an effective Board.

Objectives

1. Build SCB Oceania as a strong semi-autonomous organization with registered and charity status in Australia.
2. Expand and diversify Oceania Section membership.
3. Support the setting up and maintenance of Chapters in different parts of the region
4. Develop internal policies to support strong governance and clarity of purpose consistent with our mission and vision.

Annual Report against objectives:

As of June 30, 2020 SCB Oceania is a registered not for profit in Australia with an MOU with SCB Global that establishes it as a semi-autonomous organization. SCB Oceania achieved tax deductible DGR status in 2018 and will become a registered charity in 2020. Strong internal policy work has been completed to ensure organization processes are clearly established and documented.

During 2019 a review was completed to understand how SCB Oceania can better support its Chapters. A review of the organizational structure of SCB Oceania is underway under the guidance of external legal advice to ensure that we as a registered organization Oceania is appropriate incorporated and recognized in Australia and able to operate across the region as part of supporting Chapters and engaging members more widely. Revisions to organizational status and constitution will be tabled at our upcoming 2020 AGM to reflect this work.

With the attainment of organizational structure goals, SCB Oceania has shifted its efforts to increasing organizational capacity. In particular SCB Oceania is now focused on fundraising to increase financial ability to support and grow activities that deliver membership benefits. To this end we developed a sponsorship prospectus – *‘support us, support science-based conservation’*. The prospectus provides detail on what we do and how support might fund our activities, from on the ground, through chapters, supporting science education, conferences, policy statements

and organisational capacity. We plan to use this as a vehicle to help secure funding for chapter activities in particular. We will also launch fundraising campaigns timed with our in person events in 2021.

It is worth noting that goal 2 is to grow and diversify SCB Oceania membership. However, in 2019 we experienced a significant drop in membership from 415 members to 294 members. This drop in membership is in line with SCB Global changes in membership of ~30% drop across all sections and at a global level. This drop in membership has been attributed to simultaneous significant events including: change in SCB membership fee structure which increased fees across the board but with largest increases for lower income members; COVID19 global pandemic and associated economic crisis which has impacted discretionary funds (both personal and institutional) to be used for membership dues; cancelled in person conferences due to COVID19 public health recommendations. While the SCB Oceania membership drop reflects this global pattern of membership losses, and is thus unlikely to reflect particular services delivered by us, it does expose the risks to SCB Oceania as an organization to rely upon membership solely through SCB Global membership. As an organization SCB Oceania will reflect on this risk and how best to manage it as we transform our organizational structure in 2020 and beyond.

II. CONSERVATION SCIENCE & EDUCATION

Goal Statement

Scientific research, partnering with local and traditional knowledge, provides the essential platform for evidence-based policy, management, and education. Our conservation science is relevant and accessible, and provides solutions. We provide education, training, and capacity-building programmes in conservation to ensure that this science is available to the public, conservation managers, policy-makers, and communities.

Rationale and Strategic Impact

SCBO form part of a global community of natural and social scientists, managers, and policy-makers committed to using science to support conservation management and policy.

Scientific information that informs and integrates with policy and management is vital to halting biodiversity loss and sustaining complex evolutionary and ecological processes. SCBO members conduct science for effecting biodiversity conservation through local action, management, and policy at local, national, and global scales. We make our work clear, understandable, accessible, and applicable. We integrate our science into education and training programs to ensure it is being used by relevant communities to solve conservation problems.

Objectives

1. Develop an education initiative every two years that addresses the region's need for continuing education and training capacity.
2. Develop and build partnerships with organisations involved in conservation in Oceania (e.g. universities, research centers, NGOs) to enhance educational and outreach opportunities in conservation.
3. Award individuals recognising their contribution to effective conservation.
4. Associate and lift our profile at other relevant meetings (e.g. ecological and wildlife management societies).
5. Support *Pacific Conservation Biology* and promote the journal to top conservation scientists for publishing and access.

Annual report against objectives:

HCA-SCBO Partnered Conference 2020– SCBO planned a joint conference with HCA for 2020 in which workshops and short courses would have been delivered. Due to the global pandemic the partnered conference was postponed to 2021.

Earth Optimism 2020 – SCBO planned a partner earth optimism one day public event with Taronga Conservation Society for April 22, 2020. Due to the global pandemic the partnered public event was postponed to 2021. In place of this in person event targeted social media posts were instead released hourly across the day on April 22, 2020 and we contributed to a short video from the Earth Optimism Partnership that was screened at the Smithsonian virtual event.

Policy for funding chapters and chapter partnerships has been established to deliver on goal 2. This funding is aimed at partnering with our chapters to deliver on ground conservation and educational outreach. Due to the global pandemic and associated lock downs there were no in person events held in 2020 and no chapters requested funding for the July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020 period.

Future conferences and events planning is in progress -

1. Our next section meeting - SCBO 2021 in Honolulu, Hawaii in partnership with the Hawaii Conservation Alliance
2. Event for Earth Optimism Day, at Taronga Zoo, April 2021
3. 2022 SCBO conference – initial RFP released and locations being scoped to secure location and partners.

Student awards – Best student Paper, Levi Collier-Robinson for his paper published in the New Zealand Journal of Ecology ‘Embedding indigenous principles in genomic research of culturally significant species: a conservation genomics case study’

Distinguished service award – In 2020 we awarded our 3rd Oceania DSA to One People One Reef.

III. CONSERVATION POLICY & MANAGEMENT

Goal

Conservation and development policies significantly affect the long-term viability of ecosystems and their dependent organisms and processes. We provide science and knowledge to inform and improve such policies through engagement, access to scientific information, and responses to proposed government policies at local, national and international levels.

Rationale and Strategic Impact

Conservation problems and their solutions benefit if the highest quality scientific expertise is applied to all local, national, and global policies affecting biodiversity. We will seek opportunities to make this expertise and knowledge available and relevant to the public, policy makers, and key conservation institutions at local, regional, national, and international levels.

Managers and policy-makers must be committed to the use of robust science, needed to effectively manage biodiversity at local, national, and global scales. This can be promoted through active and successful communication, as well as through developing frameworks such as adaptive management. The evidence base for effective conservation will continue to be a focus, given scarce conservation resources.

Our objectives

1. Develop internal SCB Oceania policy to ensure SCB Oceania is reflecting best practice in every aspect of its business.
2. Generate and enhance interest, involvement, and capacity of conservation biologists to work effectively with policy stakeholders
3. Support development of policy response papers to major issues (see Kingsford et al. 2009), including submissions to government policies and inquiries where relevant.
4. Use conservation papers or special issues (e.g. *Pacific Conservation Biology*) in Oceania to produce a discussion papers on effective policy and management.

Annual report against objectives:

The policy committee focused efforts in 2019-2020 on development of internal policy to support SCB Oceania's organizational growth. All policies and documents are on the SCBO website to ensure transparent governance (<http://scboceania.org/about-intro/policies/>). Policies developed include:

Terms of reference - The Terms of Reference (TOR) clarify the role and functioning of the Policy Committee. We carried over previous work conducted by Kathleen and Richard on the terms of reference for the SCBO Policy Committee. We have finalised these TOR, which drew from the Global Policy Committee's TOR and our Strategic Plan.

Chapter audit - We undertook a chapter audit of our organisational structure to ensure fitness for purpose. We reviewed our processes, organisation, incorporated society, or other. Following this review we investigated different with a particular emphasis on risks and liabilities

associated with individual chapters. This review included a questionnaire of the chapter presidents about what structure they use to run their day to day processes – for example are they are charitable organisational structures for SCBO. Related to this we involved chapter presidents in our committee. We had four meetings this financial year involving chapter presidents. We used these meetings to discuss (and finalise) the guidelines and TOR. We also discussed Conservation Science Statement topics and planned the creation of Conservation Science Statement template and guidance notes. One of our key goals was to involve chapters (whether through their president or delegate) in Policy Committee matters. We are intending to continue this particular goal and intend to increase participation from chapter members in policy matters.

Policy submission guidelines - guidelines on how to draft policy submissions on policy changes such as through the drafting of new legislation or local government plans and processes on conservation science issues. These guidelines drew on the Global Policy Committee's Policy Submission Guidelines to ensure consistency with SCB Global. However, we adapted these guidelines to fit SCBOs particular context and goals. These guidelines are for SCBO members to use when drafting any policy submission, including timelines and expectations.

Submission to Senate inquiry to Australia's faunal extinction crisis - We prepared a submission to the Senate inquiry into Australia's faunal extinction crisis. It covered three main messages: 1) evidence of the decline of Australia's threatened fauna; 2) the need to strengthen environmental legislation; and 3) the need for adequate funding. The submission is available on our website.

Additionally, the declaration on land clearing that we launched at our 2016 Brisbane conference was relaunched by the Ecological Society of Australia in the lead up to Australia's 2019 federal election, with 400 conservation practitioners, academics and students as signatories.

Conservation Science Statement guidelines - We aspire for Conservation Science Statements (CSS) to be a key output of the Policy Committee. We developed guidelines on CSS and are drafting a CSS template for individuals interested in writing CSSs. We intend to have this complete by December 2019. In the upcoming financial year, we aim to have one CSS published and a second one in preparation.