

Setting the Stage for Biofuels: Policy Texts, Community of Practice, and Institutional Ambiguity at the Fourth World Conservation Congress

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Abstract

This paper explores the discussion on biofuels within the fourth World Conservation Congress (WCC) in Barcelona. The focus on energy and biofuels at the WCC was a change from previous Congresses, highlighting a new negotiation of conservation and development trade-offs within the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Resolutions and IUCN programmes from the 2000 WCC onwards built on one another to reframe energy policy in terms of sustainable use, clean energy technologies, and energy access. With this structure in place, an informal group of key actors at the 2008 WCC were able to dominate the biofuels discourse to advance international sustainability standards for biofuels production. Procedural ambiguities in the resolution contact group made this community of practice, largely formed around the Roundtable for Sustainable Biofuels, especially important. The negotiation of biofuels policies, and energy policy in general, serves as an example of a large-scale trade-off that will directly affect local conservation practice.

Keywords: biofuels, WCC, IUCN, performance, institutions, communities of practice

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INTRODUCTION

“The world’s poor people have a legitimate right to and need for increased energy services which are affordable, healthier, more reliable and more sustainable.” (IUCN 2008a: 31).

“Growing energy needs are likely to increase the conversion of arable land from crops to biofuel production, potentially leading to the creation of vast areas of biodiversity-poor monocultures, replacing agricultural areas of high biodiversity value and increasing pressure on already scarce water resources.” (IUCN 2008a: 12).

The role of biofuels in conservation remains contentious in conservation and development debates. The ecological effects of biofuels vary by region, crop, and scale (Groom *et al.* 2008; Plienenger & Bens 2008). Large-scale issues include increases in CO₂ emissions resulting from land-use changes (Fargione *et al.* 2008), impending food shortages (Runge 2007), and

losses of habitat and biodiversity (Koh 2007), while the development of biofuel plantations has the potential to harm both biodiversity and local livelihoods (Agrawal *et al.* 2008; Nelson & Robertson 2008; Ogg 2009). A World Bank report showed that 70–75% of the increase in food commodities prices from January 2002 until June 2008 was “... due to biofuels and the related consequences of low grain stocks, large land use shifts, speculative activity and export bans” (Mitchell 2008: 17). At the same time, others (Wani *et al.* 2006; Milder *et al.* 2008) argue that under ecoagricultural production, small-scale biofuels may contribute positively to both local livelihoods and conservation goals. The development of biofuels directly affects traditional systems of land tenure (McCarthy & Cramb 2009), as described by one oil company representative at the 2008 World Conservation Congress (WCC): when land tenure is ‘uncertain’, oil companies have ‘no choice’ but to talk to the government and ask for clarification, leading to standardisation of land tenure and the development of biofuel plantations. Within the 2008 WCC, biofuels were discussed as a subset of

larger energy issues and the connection between energy access, development, and biofuels emerged as a key theme.

The WCC itself was broken into two smaller events—though these were not so distinct as they might appear. The four day Forum included more than 800 events, designed “to share knowledge, to build understanding and consensus, and to form new alliances and partnerships”.¹ The Members’ Assembly was the meeting of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) members to approve the Intersessional Programme and vote on motions—over 100 resolutions and recommendations that give direction to the IUCN Secretariat, Director General, members, or other groups. The Intersessional Programme focused on the programmatic agenda, developed before the Congress, outlining the foci of IUCN’s work for the next four years.

Energy issues in general and biofuels in particular were key topics of discussion during the 2008 WCC in Barcelona. The emphasis on bioenergy and biofuels was a change from previous Congresses, highlighting a new negotiation of conservation and development trade-offs within IUCN. The biofuel/biodiversity link was not always a direct one: biofuels were wrapped within a set of other discussions on energy, development, climate change, and human rights. In this paper we examine the interaction of key actors around the issue of biofuels through the Forum and the Members’ Assembly as a performative exercise largely directed by documents and pre-existing partnerships. In particular, we focus on the resolutions and events leading up to two conflicting biofuels motions at the WCC and how those motions were reconciled with IUCN’s energy agenda. International agreements, written reports, and previous Congress outputs set the institutional stage for the WCC energy agenda, while key actors were able to drive the agenda forward. This is not to say that decisions were not made at the WCC, but that those decisions were mediated more by an ongoing discourse on energy and development than by a formal decision process. As such, the WCC serves as an example of how conservation and development trade-off decisions may be made implicitly, rather than explicitly.

METHODS

This research was conducted as part of an ‘event ethnography’ of the WCC and involved the efforts of over twenty other researchers.² Two other participating researchers were also working on aspects of biofuels, and though we did work collaboratively we have tried to separate our notes from theirs for the purposes of this paper. The event ethnography methodology was conceived as a strategic attempt to allow researchers to be in many places at once and to avoid some of the opportunity costs associated with conducting interviews and observations during a short-term high-intensity event. As part of the research process, researchers were in frequent communication with one another during the Congress sessions, the daily research meetings, and informally during off hours—since most of the research team was staying in an adjacent pair of apartments in Barcelona for the duration of the Congress.

This study was rooted in approaches to “studying-up” (Nader 1972; Gusterson 1997; Conti & O’Neil 2007) and institutional ethnography (MacDonald 2003; Smith 2005, 2006) during the WCC. The primary method used during the WCC was participant observation during the Forum and Members’ Assembly. While our interviews were productive, the scheduling constraints of the Congress made continual interviewing problematic and rapport difficult to secure. Interview questions dealt with the perceived risks and benefits of biofuels, the trade-offs involved in their negotiation, and the role of the WCC in the development of biofuels policy. In addition, we conducted an analysis of paper and electronic documents, including the IUCN Programmes 2001–2004, 2005–2008, and 2009–2012, and the texts of most resolutions and recommendations from the 1950s to the present, looking for key institutional structures that set the terms for the current debate.

RESULTS

Energy and Biofuels at Earlier Congresses: Building the Stage

International agreements, written reports, and previous Congress outputs set the institutional stage for the WCC energy agenda. More than that, resolutions and IUCN Programmes from the 2000 WCC onwards built on one another to reframe energy policy in terms of sustainable use, clean energy technologies, and energy access, versus an earlier focus on energy conservation and pollution. With this institutional structure in place, an informal group of key actors at the 2008 WCC were able to dominate the biofuels discourse to advance international sustainability standards for biofuels production. Within the Congress, these documents are important not only for their content, but also for the ways in which they self-reference and legitimise one another and the narratives they represent.

A review of the last three four-year IUCN Programmes reveals an increased focus on the production of sustainable energy. The 2001–2004 Programme (IUCN 2000) makes no mention of energy, fuel, or biofuels. By the 2005–2008 Programme, the IUCN Secretariat had taken note of upcoming energy issues, placing a focus on energy development and links to biodiversity:

Energy is likely to become a more important issue in the coming years. While the impact of energy production on climate will remain a major preoccupation for many biodiversity organizations, broader issues of the impact of energy generation and use on sustainable development need more attention from the conservation community. The use of renewable sources of energy, such as biomass, can have profound effects on biodiversity but these effects have received inadequate attention to date (IUCN 2004: 16).

The new attention to energy issues within the Programme was mirrored—in some cases preceded—by the adoption of

energy resolutions during the Members' Assembly. At the First WCC in 1996, three of five energy-related resolutions took on new ground. Resolution 1.41 gave several directives to the IUCN Environmental Law Programme, including "legal analysis on the development of energy law and policy, especially for encouraging expanded use of energy efficiency instruments and renewable sources of energy". Resolution 1.51 promoted granting indigenous peoples benefit-sharing and compensation for environmental damages from oil and mineral extraction. Resolution 1.7 on IUCN's strategy for the Arctic was the first to connect energy supply/demand and greenhouse gases (IUCN 2008b).

By the Second WCC in 2000 the energy agenda was beginning to unfold in full (IUCN 2008b). Resolution 2.32 focused on the connection between energy conservation and organic agriculture; 2.34 on the role of multilateral financial institutions and the funding of extractive industries; 2.57 on the development of guidelines for oil exploration in arid zones; and 2.94 on climate change, land use, and fossil-fuel emissions. For the current energy agenda, however, Resolution 2.17 would become the most important. Resolution 2.17 contained a suite of provisions on climate change and energy, energy efficiency, and a directive to the Director General to work with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to disseminate the World Energy Assessment (WEA). Among other provisions, 2.17:

CALLS ON the Director General to request IUCN Regional Offices, within available means, to assist the United Nations Development Programme to disseminate information about the World Energy Assessment and to help educate government officials, civil society, and the private sector about the World Energy Assessment and about cleaner, more affordable available energy options evaluated therein (IUCN 2008b).

Resolution 2.17 marked the beginning of the turn towards a focus on energy access and development, and would continue to bear fruit in 2004 and 2008.

At the Third WCC in Bangkok in 2004, the IUCN energy agenda continued to develop, drawing from a suite of reports and agreements (IUCN 2005). Resolution 2.17, from 2000, was specifically referenced twice, in the new Resolutions 3.059 and 3.086. Resolution 3.059 built on both 2.17 and Agenda 21, asking IUCN to advance "ecologically-sound energy systems for sustainable development, as a necessary and core part of the biodiversity conservation" and for the Director General to "develop a plan of action within the IUCN Programme on ecologically-sound energy systems for sustainable development, climate stabilisation, and conservation of biological diversity". Resolution 3.086 also drew from 2.17 and Agenda 21, along with the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) Plan of Implementation, asking IUCN to coordinate its energy work with other international agreements, particularly the UN Commission on Sustainable Development and the United Nations General Assembly.

Energy and Biofuels at the Fourth WCC: The Programme

By the 2008 Congress, the Programme for 2009–2012 contained a substantial energy focus, with energy issues taking up an entire section [Thematic Programme Area 3: Naturally Energizing the Future (IUCN 2008a: 30–31)] with two explicit goals:

Global Result 3.1: Energy policies and strategies mitigate the impact of the growing energy demand on biodiversity.

Global Result 3.2: Ecosystem services that underpin sustainable and equitable energy are incorporated in energy policies and strategies.

The 2009–2012 Programme places emphasis on both the risks of biofuel production and their potential benefits:

- Increasing oil prices and concerns about the limits of fossil fuels are projected to increase the production and use of biofuels (ethanol and bio-diesel) almost fivefold... Growing energy needs are likely to increase the conversion of arable land from crops to biofuel production, potentially leading to the creation of vast areas of biodiversity-poor monocultures, replacing agricultural areas of high biodiversity value and increasing pressure on already scarce water resources (IUCN 2008a: 12).
- The International Energy Agency predicts a 50% growth in demand for energy by 2030, with 80% of that demand to be met by fossil fuels. The World Energy Council has produced several scenarios and most of these predict a considerable expansion in biomass energy, especially between 2050 and 2100 (IUCN 2008a: 31).
- ... About 1.6 billion people currently lack access to electricity and over 2 billion people depend on traditional biomass fuels for cooking and heating. Often women suffer most from 'energy poverty' because they are responsible for gathering food, fuel and water. The world's poor people have a legitimate right to and need for increased energy services which are affordable, healthier, more reliable and more sustainable (IUCN 2008a: 31).

Energy and Biofuels at the Fourth WCC: Key Motions

The major energy-related motions at the Congress dealt with the issues of climate change (Motions 98 and 99, both of which referenced the earlier resolution 2.17); equitable energy sharing (Motions 102); wind power (Motions 103³); and biofuels (Motions 104 and 105). Motion 102 invoked Agenda 21, the ninth session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-9), the WSSD Plan of Implementation, and CSD-15 to call for sustainable development, particularly noting the importance of energy in poverty eradication and that "it is generally acknowledged that access to reliable, affordable, economically viable, socially acceptable and environmentally sound energy services is crucial, particularly for developing

countries". The motion also explicitly cited Resolutions 3.059 and 3.086, as well as 2.17. Motion 102 was adopted as Resolution 4.081—"Equitable access to energy" (IUCN 2009).

Motions 104 and 105 both dealt directly with biofuels, though in different ways. Motion 104 cited Resolutions 2.17, 3.059, and 3.086, placing special emphasis on the directive for the Director General to educate "government officials, civil society, and the private sector [...] about cleaner, more affordable available energy options" (IUCN 2008b). The focus of Motion 104 was a call for adoption of criteria for the sustainable production of "sustainable biomass-based energy" within both governments and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Many of the key players in the negotiation of Motion 104 and Motion 105 were also involved in multiple Forum discussions around sustainability standards for biofuels. Motion 104 was eventually adopted as Resolution 4.082—"Sustainable biomass-based energy" (IUCN 2009).

Motion 105, calling for a moratorium on the expansion of industrial biofuel production, addressed the issue from a slightly different direction. The motion cited IUCN Resolution 2.94 from the Second WCC in 2000, in particular sections (g) and (h) on participation, local benefits, and indigenous rights. Motion 105 also drew a clear divide between local, traditional biomass use and large-scale agrofuel production. The intent of the moratorium was to provide time for additional research on the impacts of agrofuel production and stem the destruction from planned mega-projects. Motion 105 was eventually adopted—minus its moratorium language—as Resolution 4.083—"Industrial agrofuel production" (IUCN 2009).

With Motion 104 promoting standards for sustainable production and Motion 105 calling for a moratorium on new agrofuel production, a conflict appeared. Motion 104 carried with it a set of narratives promoting sustainability, economic growth, and a right to energy access. Motion 105 brought a concern about habitat destruction and the right of local groups to control and benefit from their own lands. Motions 104 and 105 were referred to an "*ad hoc* contact group" (a small committee) "to see if they can be harmonised and if not, to avoid contradictory policy guidance, to clearly indicate those operant paragraphs in each motion that would be contradictory if adopted so as to provide members a clear choice when forwarded to the Members' Assembly" (IUCN 2008c).

The 2008 WCC Forum

The previous IUCN Programmes and resolutions, along with the international agreements and reports that they invoked, set much of the stage for the 2008 WCC energy agenda. Having looked at the background leading up to the 2008 WCC and the energy- and biofuels-focused motions, it is useful to look in more detail at the Forum before examining how Motions 104 and 105 were eventually sorted into their final forms.

The activities during the Forum were directed into thematic journeys, one of which was the Energy Journey. The Energy Journey was coordinated by the IUCN Energy, Ecosystems and Livelihoods Initiative, which was founded in 2007 as a

response to concerns over sustainable energy and development. The Energy Journey was designed to help visitors navigate the busy schedule of the Forum. From a research perspective, having a thematic journey provided a side benefit: many of the same faces continued to appear at sessions on biofuels and energy policy. In keeping with IUCN's ongoing engagements with private sector partners (MacDonald this issue), representatives from two oil companies (Shell Oil and BP) were present. Other recurring attendees included the staff of IUCN's Energy, Ecosystems and Livelihoods Initiative and representatives of Helio International, the Sierra Club, and the National Wildlife Federation. Interviews confirmed that many of these individuals had met one another or worked together in the past, and therefore already knew each other. While this was not very surprising, since the field of international sustainable energy policy is so specialised, it would prove to be important in the Members' Assembly.

Several sessions during the Energy Journey dealt specifically with the development of standards for the production of sustainable biofuels. At the core of these discussions was the Roundtable for Sustainable Biofuels (RSB), an international organisation dedicated to the development of sustainability standards for biofuel production. The Steering Board of the RSB is made up of individuals from multiple sectors (NGOs, industry, academia), including former IUCN Director General Achim Steiner and former WWF Director General Claude Martin. Version Zero—the first version of RSB's Sustainability Standards endorsed by members of the public and private sector, including IUCN Chief Scientist Jeff McNeely and IUCN member the National Wildlife Federation⁴—was displayed and discussed. The presenters and discussants in these sessions included many of the same actors mentioned above as followers of the Energy Journey. Through several forum sessions, biofuels were asserted as a remedy for climate change due to fossil fuel use, with the idea that carbon emissions should be the key measure for the success or failure of biofuels initiatives. Members also raised issues of current "first generation" biofuels versus "second generation" biofuels that will be more efficient and environmentally friendly—though they may be ten years from production (field notes: WCC 2008). Representatives of RSB were present in several Forum sessions and seemed to drive much of the discussion.

Negotiation of Motions 104 and 105: The Members' Assembly

During the Members' Assembly, Motions 104 and 105 were referred to an *ad hoc* contact group for harmonisation and/or clarification. Contact groups, as specified in the WCC Motions Manual (IUCN 2008d), were publicly scheduled meetings set for two hours each, chaired by a delegate appointed by the IUCN Resolutions Committee. Each contact group also had a motion manager from the IUCN Secretariat who was in charge of tracking changes to the motion(s). The Motions Manual lays out guidelines for the approval of amendments through a democratic process, with changes projected on a screen for

the consideration of members. When no clear majority could agree on one text over another, both texts would be included in brackets—to be resolved in the plenary. Negotiated motions proceeded from the contact group to the plenary session for voting by the membership.

The contact group comprised IUCN members (who could propose text and vote during the group process) and observers (who could speak but not vote). Motion 104 was sponsored by the IUCN Council and supported by members of RSB. Supporters of Motion 105 included the motion's many sponsors: the Sierra Club, Pro Natura–Friends of the Earth Switzerland, Asociación para la Conservación e Investigación de la Biodiversidad y el Desarrollo Sostenible–SAVIA, Nigerian Conservation Foundation, and the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation. While the discussion was open, leading voices emerged early in the process: representatives from IUCN's Commission on Environmental, Economic, and Social Policy (CEESP); RSB; the Sierra Club; and the Wilderness Society of Australia.

The harmonisation of Motions 104 and 105 was difficult from the beginning. At the beginning of the contact group, a new text—a combined version of both motions—was projected on the screen. The combined text had been drafted by a member from the Sierra Club (sponsoring Motion 105) to facilitate discussion. Several concerns were raised in the contact group:

- that the text as written overstated the negatives of biofuels
- that biofuels may be of benefit, particularly to poor rural women
- that some modes of biofuel production could help to reduce CO₂ emissions
- that biofuels could reduce emissions while sustaining economic growth

During the discussion, some members raised questions about the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and whether calling for a moratorium on new agrofuel (large-scale industrial biofuel) development would create a conflict. Particular attention was drawn to a section of the Ninth Conference of the Parties to the CBD asking parties to “address both, direct and indirect, positive and negative impacts that the production and use of biomass for energy, in particular large-scale and/or industrial production and use, might have on... biodiversity”. This section (Decision IX/5) was ultimately included in the text of Motion 104 (IUCN 2009).

There were also questions about whether a moratorium—the focus of Motion 105—would “put IUCN on the outside”. In one exchange, a supporter of the moratorium idea suggested that “governments have a responsibility to protect their lands”, to which another member responded that due to the bicameral structure of the WCC plenary (with governments in one body and NGOs in the other—both sides needing to accept a resolution for passage), governments would be likely to reject a moratorium, even a short-term one. One suggestion was to remove the moratorium language and replace it with a call for life cycle analysis of all large-scale biofuels projects. There was also a suggestion that a “softer language” was needed. As one member put it: “things are happening; we need our feet on

the ground. We need to urge governments to use guidelines” (Field notes: WCC 2008).

The definition of agrofuels proved problematic. One argument was that, without quantification, anything could be considered ‘industrial’. The contact group members appeared to agree that the intention was to distinguish between large-scale habitat destruction and small-scale sustainable production, but there was difficulty in couching it in a language that would make it clear in the ‘harmonised’ motion. To the question of new large-scale agrofuels projects, a supporter of Motion 104 responded: “it doesn't look like that is going away any time soon”.

The last question dealt with a section in Motion 104 that called on the WTO to adopt sustainability standards for biofuels as a requisite for trade. Though this section was ultimately changed to remove any reference to the WTO, one member explained that this had been included in recognition that, even if conservationists prefer small-scale production, there will be trade. At the close of the two-hour session, the harmonised text was sent to a smaller ‘drafting group’ for final wordsmithing. This drafting group was made up of members from RSB, CEESP, the Sierra Club, and Natural Resources Canada.

Subsequently, we (and several other contact group attendees) learned that the drafting group had un-consolidated the two motions, and would be submitting them to the Resolutions Committee. An email quickly followed from a member of RSB, suggesting that the now un-consolidated Motion 104 needed further wordsmithing, which could perhaps be done informally. This was followed by another email message regarding an impromptu meeting focusing on further discussion. Apparently some editing had taken place during the un-consolidation meeting early that morning, and more change needed to be incorporated. The motions took their final shape on a laptop, with a handful of members making small edits to the final text.

During a meeting just before the vote on Motions 104 and 105, a group of interested IUCN members met outside the doors of the auditorium for an informal discussion. One member wanted to raise the contact group irregularities on the floor of the Assembly, but was told by others that (though it was within his rights to do so) mentioning it on the floor of the plenary would be a death knell for both motions. Why, he wondered, had nobody known about the early morning small group meeting? Who was making the decisions? A member from the Wilderness Society of Australia said that he had stumbled on the morning drafting meeting, suspecting that key decisions would be made there his response was telling: “I'm sorry—you are right—it is unfair; but that is how the system works” (Field notes: WCC 2008).

DISCUSSION

At the WCC, the production of biofuels was described as an urgent issue: one where decisions in the next five to ten years are critical because of decreasing petroleum production, increased demand, and increasing biofuel production. Energy scenarios from Shell Oil (Shell Energy 20085), used

as planning tools by IUCN, and emerging standards for sustainable biofuel production (Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels) are in agreement on this issue, as are many conservationists. The need for development of standards for biofuel production appeared to be largely uncontested as a desired outcome within formal venues. Motions 104 and 105 both addressed this urgency in very different ways: Motion 104 called for sustainable production, while Motion 105 called for a temporary moratorium on additional agrofuel production to buy time for a more detailed impact analysis. In general terms, these are the two dominant positions regarding biofuels within the conservation field.

Motions 104 and 105 both passed in amended form (as Resolutions 4.082 and 4.083). The largest change was the removal of the moratorium language in Motion 105, replaced with a call for impact analysis, “including life-cycle analyses of existing and new large-scale biofuel production”. Motion 105 went to the plenary floor with two text options present—one with the moratorium language, the other with a call for regulatory structures and impact analysis. Once presented, the Sierra Club (the sponsor of Motion 105) was told by the IUCN attorney that a vote on the moratorium language would not be allowed “because the Motions Committee had commented that it was in conflict with Motion 104, which had just passed” and that a protest could endanger the entire motion (Cellarius 2008).

The contact group process for Motions 104 and 105 was ultimately effective in bringing passable resolutions to the plenary floor, despite some confusion. Subsequently, an IUCN member described losing the moratorium option without a vote as “having the rug pulled out from under you” and the use of email as a communication tool for scheduling meetings as problematic, since not all participants were checking email continuously. Perhaps more importantly, during the contact group, at least one member felt “shut out”—as though the leading discussants were continuing an earlier conversation, and it would be inappropriate to interrupt.

The contact group for Motions 104 and 105 illustrated two processes: the operation of a community of practice and the result of institutional ambiguity. The conservation and sustainable energy community is not large, and interviews and observation showed that many of the key actors in the sustainability standards process had worked together before. To be absolutely clear: we are not suggesting any sort of smoke-filled room with individuals conspiring to affect the outcome of the process. We are saying that the shared activity of negotiating policy for sustainable biofuels and energy in general creates a community of practice (Wenger 1998), which legitimises individual activities and shapes professional identities. The presence of a community of practice does not require that a group work together formally for an extended period. It does, however, “imply participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities” (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). As a community, these participants put forward

narratives that dominated the discourse within the contact group, advancing a sustainability standards agenda through the exercise of discursive power (Hajer 1995). This was done both by referencing earlier conversations as in “remember the meeting at the CBD CoP?” (Field notes: WCC 2008) and by choice of words: “we agree that a moratorium is a problem” (Field notes: WCC 2008).

The eventual outcome of the process was also enabled by an institutional ambiguity within the contact group over the process of democratic engagement: Who would speak first, for how long, in what order? Why was the process begun with a pre-combined text rather than the two motions as submitted? When would additional meetings occur, and how would participants be notified? Such details of how the process was supposed to unfold were uncertain for many of the actors involved, and in that sense, were accepted as rather normal events. These uncertainties also opened space in which a core of actors functioning as a community of practice was able to lead the process forward. Under conditions of institutional ambiguity, the unfolding of discourse becomes important in negotiating the process of engagement, but so does the way that speech is performed, including the physical setting—be that a formal contact group room or a huddle around a laptop at the back of the plenary hall (Hajer & Veerstag 2005; Hajer 2006). Ultimately, the negotiation process needed to be viewed as legitimate, and there was an explicit recognition within the group that the appearance of legitimacy needed to be maintained, or both motions might be at risk within the larger body. This applied not only to what was said in the group, but also to what would remain unsaid.

Where institutional structures within the contact group were unclear, larger institutions—in the form of earlier resolutions, agreements, reports, and programmes—were critical to the framing of biofuels and energy at the WCC. Prior to the WCC in 2000, most of IUCN’s energy focus had been on the conservation consequences of exploration, extraction, and transport. The adoption of Resolution 2.17 at the 2000 Congress marked the beginning of a shift away from ‘energy as pollutant’ toward the promotion of affordable energy alternatives for sustainable development. This shift can be traced backwards from Resolution 2.17 to the WEA, which was an outgrowth of Agenda 21. Resolution 2.17, in turn, continues to be cited in the development of motions promoting energy access. By the time of the 2008 WCC, access to new forms of energy was being framed as a ‘legitimate human right’ (IUCN 2008a: 31) and the importance of increased energy for development was put forward as an unquestioned priority. Under these institutional conditions, efforts to restrict agrofuel development were described as ‘overly negative’ and impractical, while sustainable production standards were seen as a necessary step.

CONCLUSION

Without banning the moratorium initiative, and while maintaining a democratic process, IUCN managed to defend

its position during the motions negotiations on biofuels. As one IUCN staff member said when interviewed by the Event Ethnography team, “How things happen in IUCN is very political. If you want your idea to be heard, you need to know how the system works for making something happen”. This was evident during the biofuels motions’ negotiations.

Many of the actors involved in biofuels discussions at the WCC commented that hard choices must be made, and that there are rarely win-win scenarios. Conservation and development trade-offs have often been conceived as local issues of access, participation, and resource use (Fernandes *et al.* 1999; Brown *et al.* 2001; Faith & Walker 2002). Conservation and development trade-offs can also occur at the policy level, where evolving institutional structures and communities of practice combine to influence policy outcomes. Whether or not the WCC has any practical bearing on the execution of global conservation as compared, for example, to the CBD, the network of international meetings and agreements work together to legitimise certain perspectives while denying others. The development of policy networks proceeds in a way that may be simultaneously democratic, ambiguous, and constrained by networks of individuals and institutions—a process that has implications for both local conservation practice and the development of future policy.

Notes

1. From www.iucn.org/congress_08/forum/. Accessed on May 18, 2009.
2. This research was supported by the Advancing Conservation in a Social Context initiative (www.tradeoffs.org), made possible by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.
3. Motion 103, Environmental Impacts of Wind Power in Spanish and Portuguese Mountains, was energy-related, but since it dealt with a specific issue (wildlife and wind power generation) minimally connected to biofuels, we will not be discussing it further here.
4. As described in a 13 August 2008 news release: <http://cms.iucn.org/fr/faisons/themes/energie/?uNewsID=1629>. Accessed on May 12, 2009.
5. Note that both Shell Oil’s Energy Scenarios to 2050 and the IUCN Programme for 2009–2012 draw data from the International Energy Agency (IEA). The IEA released their 2008 World Energy Outlook on November 12, 2008 (just after the WCC), severely reducing their previous estimates of available petroleum reserves.

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