



WCEL

WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL LAW
COMMISSION MONDIALE DE DROIT DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT
COMISION MUNDIAL DE DERECHO AMBIENTAL

19th December 2025

Dear IUCN WCEL members,

As 2025 comes to an end, it is once again with immense gratitude to all of you that we reflect on the accomplishments of our Commission.

This year marks the end of this IUCN quadrennium (2021 – 2025), which started with the [IUCN World Conservation Congress \(WCC\) held in Marseille in 2021](#) and concluded with [the IUCN WCC held in Abu Dhabi last October](#). The resolutions and recommendations adopted by IUCN Members will help guide the work of our Union in this new cycle. This roadmap is also expressed in [IUCN's Strategic Vision and Programme](#). We wish to thank everyone who joined us both in person and online during the many events organized by WCEL during the WCC.

Special thanks must go to WCEL Steering Committee members David Forman and Claudia de Windt, who served as Election Officer and Deputy Election Officer respectively during the WCC. It is due of their hard work and professionalism that the process of electing the [IUCN leadership \(President, Council and Commission Chairs\) for the next four years](#) was both possible and equitable. In this regard, [Prof. Dr. Christina Voigt was re-elected Chair of IUCN WCEL](#) by the IUCN Members.

The IUCN Council approved, in its first meeting in Abu Dhabi, the reappointment of IUCN WCEL Deputy Chair Ayman Cherkaoui, as well as the first batch of new [IUCN WCEL Steering Committee members](#).

The main WCEL event in 2025 was the [4th IUCN WCEL World Environmental Law Congress](#), held in Rabat, Morocco from 5 to 7 May. Over three days, 200 speakers from 66 countries and 2000 participants (in person or online) joined the 7 plenary sessions and 20 parallel sessions. Many thanks to our hosts, the Hassan II International Center for Environmental Training, and its Director and WCEL Deputy Chair, Ayman Cherkaoui, for their hospitality and the [success of the event](#).

As it is now tradition during our World Environmental Law Congresses, WCEL announced in Rabat the winners of the **2025 IUCN WCEL Nicholas Robinson Award for Excellence in Environmental Law and Policy**. [This year's awardees were Cymie Payne, Francesco Sindico and Claudia de Windt](#) for their work in the three IUCN advisory opinion submissions before international courts – the ITLOS, ICJ, and IACtHR, respectively.

In line with this, early in July [WCEL welcomed the advisory opinion on "Climate Emergency and Human Rights" by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights \(IACtHR\)](#); and only a few days later the Commission did the same regarding [the historic advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice \(ICJ\)](#). These two developments, along with [last year's advisory opinion by the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea \(ITLOS\)](#), stand as milestones of our collective efforts, which will hopefully have an impact on environmental governance worldwide.

The **Biodiversity Law Specialist Group** (BLSG) (Chair: Emmanuel Kasimbazi, Deputy Chair: Michelle Lim) worked on legal guidance for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF)

Target 3 (30x30), synergies among biodiversity-related conventions, emerging issues such as novel entities, and the ongoing *“Policy on Synthetic Biology in Relation to Conservation: A Legal Analysis of the Call for a Moratorium on Releases”* has further elevated their collective impact. The SG also celebrates progress in implementing the BBNJ Agreement and the adoption of the EU Nature Restoration Law, even as continuing negotiations and national reforms highlight the pressing need for innovative legal responses.

The **Climate Change Law Specialist Group** (Co-Chair: Francesco Sindico, Co-Chair: Fabiano de Andrade Correa) has had a busy 2025: From their contribution to the ICJ AO to the restructuring into five thematic clusters, from the organization of [webinars](#) to a fantastic hybrid strategy meeting just a few days ago, all its members have been particularly active, including strong presence at the IUCN WCC.

The **Early Career Specialist Group** (Chair: Marina Venâncio, Deputy Chair: Alvin Gachie) continued its active engagement with new professionals. We would like to thank all young professionals in the Commission for their brilliant and active engagement in WCEL's work and the ECSG projects over the past five years, particularly the project leads. This included launching and running the first-ever Mentorship Programme, building capacity on emerging environmental law topics, unpacking the science-policy dimension of environmental rule of law, and connecting individuals and ideas

The **Environmental Security and Conflict Law Specialist Group** (Chair: Karen Hulme, Deputy Chair: Daniëlla Dam-de Jong) was invited to provide [comments on the International Criminal Court's Draft Policy on Addressing Environmental Damage through the Rome Statute](#), with some of their comments reflected in the revised version of the Policy adopted in December 2025. The SG held a very informative session at the Annual Conference in Rabat on Safeguarding the environment during past wars and conflicts, touching on aspects of the intersection of environmental protection, accountability, and conflict. Topics ranged from citizen science monitoring wartime environmental crimes to the criminalization of environmental defenders, exploring how legal frameworks both fail and innovate in safeguarding people and ecosystems.

The **Ethics Specialist Group** (ESG) (Chair: Katy Gwiazon, Deputy Chair: Cristiane Derani) had a productive year in advancing their workplan – focusing on ecological law and governance, decolonialism, and the internal governance of IUCN and WCEL. The 40th anniversary of the ESG on “The Place and Power of IUCN for Peace, Justice, and Life on Earth,” hosted by partners in Jordan and the IUCN Regional Office of West Asia, had to be postponed yet again due to the continued insecurity in Palestine and the region. Leading up to the IUCN Congress in Abu Dhabi, the ESG supported motions and workshops related to the role of women in conservation, Earth jurisprudence and the rights of nature, conservation and conflict, colonial legacies of conservation, socio-economic impacts of dams, species trafficking, and IUCN's new collaboration with the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty. The ESG was also proud to partner with the European University of Rome and the Global Ecological Integrity Group for their 33rd international conference on “Ecological Integrity and Emergency Law and Governance,” with a publication in development for 2026, following the ESG's support of the 2025 publication, “Ecological Integrity and International Law: Peace, Public Health, and Global Security” (Routledge).

In 2025, the **Global Judicial Institute on the Environment (GJIE)** (Chair: Nick Bryner) participated in and co-organized events on the role of the judiciary in addressing environmental law and climate change. Two highlights include a workshop in May 2025 on judges and climate change at the Ibero-American Judicial Summit in the Dominican Republic, as well as the Justice Day at COP 30 in Belém, Brazil in November, in which GJIE members and partners contributed to a day-long event on climate change litigation and jurisprudence.

In November 2025, the **Model Forest Act Initiative (MoFAI) Task Force** (Chair: Chief Justice Antonio Benjamin) launched the preliminary draft of the General Part of the Model Forest Act during a side event at the UNFCCC COP 30 in Belém, Brazil. The draft is a framework for modernizing forest legislation to meet current needs in responding to climate change and the biodiversity crisis and to improve compliance, enforcement, and access to justice. WCEL and other partners will be working with MoFAI to gather feedback, revise, and finalize the draft in the coming year.

After its active involvement at the WCEL Congress in Rabat, the **Ocean Law Specialist Group** (Chair: Cymie Payne, Deputy Chair: Pradeep Singh), together with the IUCN Secretariat, the Mohammed VI Foundation and other partners also organised a workshop on BBNJ for government officials in Morocco. In June, the SG advanced the ocean governance agenda at side events and supporting the IUCN Secretariat at the Ocean Science Congress and UN Ocean Conference in Nice on the BBNJ Agreement, marine carbon dioxide removal, and deep seabed mining. Anticipating the 17 January 2026 entry into force of the BBNJ Agreement, the SG organized a side event at the BBNJ PrepCom meeting that featured newly-elected International Court of Justice judge Phoebe Okowa. At the International Seabed Authority, the SG, with the IUCN Secretariat, co-convened the Deep Sea Dialogues. Finally, at the WCC in Abu Dhabi, the SG provided technical advice and support for resolutions addressing the protection of the mesopelagic zone and sea mounts, and spoke at several side events.

In 2025, the **Agreement on Plastic Pollution Task Force** (Chair: Alexandra Harrington) produced over a half dozen [briefs following the conclusion of INC-5.1](#), in advance of INC-5.2 and following INC-5.2. As the negotiations for the Plastics Treaty have been extended and become more nuanced, the Task Force has been an active part of training multiple countries and observers on the stages of the process, critical procedural issues and emerging legal issues. Represented by its Chair, the Task Force has an ongoing role in the negotiations as part of the IUCN delegation as well as one of the representatives of Guinea Bissau on the Legal Drafting Group. The Task Force also participated at official side events during the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Convention COPs and UNEA7. The Task Force also participated as part of the IUCN delegation for the BRS Convention COPs, the final negotiation for a Science-Policy Panel and the pre-session planning for the Global Framework on Chemicals. From 2026 the Task Force will become the **Pollution Law Specialist Group** (Chair: Alexandra Harrington).

The **Rights of Nature Task Force** (Chair: Philippe Cullet) is delighted that the year 2025 is ending on a high note with the adoption of several resolutions at the WCC that reflect the rapid advancement of discourses around rights of nature. This strengthens the framework for the work of the SG first laid out in a 2012 resolution, with resolutions speaking to rights of nature generally and on some specific elements of nature (*e.g.* rivers) and territories (*e.g.* Antarctica). From 2026 the Task Force will become the **Rights of Nature Specialist Group** (Chair: Philippe Cullet).

The **Soil and Sustainable Agriculture Law Specialist Group** (Chair: Irene Heuser, Deputy Chair: Edwin Alblas) initiated a motion for the IUCN WCC on “soil security law” which was approved (therefore, it is now a resolution) with a high majority and which in particular means a clear mandate for WCEL to strive for a global legal instrument on soil security. In addition, the SG held discussions at Lisbon University about the new EU Soil Monitoring Directive and at the Academy of Environmental Law about national (Model Law for Africa on sustainable soil management, endorsed by Pan-African Parliament recently) and regional legal instruments for soil security.

The **Water and Wetlands Law Specialist Group** (Chair: Stefano Burchi, Deputy Chair: Michael Hantke-Domas) is happy to announce that the [Manifesto for the Freshwater Rule of Law](#) has matured to the point where a suite of “principles” and it is now available. The aim of the manifesto is to encapsulate good practice in national legislation for the governance of water resources; and to inspire change in

the way access to water, use and protection of the resource are regulated by countries through their national water and water-related legislation.

Looking ahead, as we prepare our workplans for this new quadrennium, and as a result of the mandates given by IUCN Members at the WCC, we are pleased to announce the creation of two new Specialist Groups: **Human Rights and the Environment SG** and **Crimes Against the Environment SG** (Chair: John Scanlon, Deputy Chair: Ana Motamayor).

On behalf of IUCN WCEL, we would like to express our profound gratitude to all Specialist Groups Chairs and Deputy Chairs and all Task Force Leaders, as well as to all members of the WCEL Steering Committee (past and present) for your unwavering dedication, support and contributions to WCEL.

Many thanks and warm greetings to all members of IUCN WCEL. Together, we will continue to drive the legal innovations needed to protect our common home.

Wishing you a peaceful and prosperous New Year.



Prof. Dr. Christina Voigt
Chair
World Commission on Environmental Law
International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)



Ayman Cherkaoui
Deputy Chair
World Commission on Environmental Law
International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)