

LESSONS LEARNED FROM A DESKTOP REVIEW OF CONSERVATION AREAS IN DENMARK: APPLYING IUCN MANAGEMENT CATEGORIES FOR PROTECTED AREAS

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ABSTRACT

As time and resources are often limited, new ways of reporting on national protected areas as part of international conservation commitments can be beneficial. Denmark has, as many other parties, signed the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and been requested to report to the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) on its national status for protected areas. The IUCN Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories are globally recognised and referenced in the WDPA. In 2018, the IUCN National Committee of Denmark undertook a project on behalf of the Danish Environmental Protection Agency to assess a specific type of protected area in Denmark called Conservation Areas and to identify which of these areas could be assigned IUCN management categories. The project was a desktop review and found that 22 per cent of the Conservation Areas assessed fulfilled the IUCN definition of a protected area. This project has shown that an assessment can be done relatively quickly by using a standardised method, and although there are limitations with desktop reviews, they can be a useful option for countries wanting to improve their reporting to the WDPA.

Key words: Protected areas, Danish Conservation Areas, IUCN Guidelines on Protected Area Management Categories, WDPA, Aichi Target 11, CBD, international conservation commitments

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 2017, the IUCN National Committee of Denmark started looking into the possibility of a project where the IUCN Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories could be applied to Danish protected areas. The original idea was to write a manual for the guidelines in Danish on how to apply the Protected Area Management Categories in a Danish context. The Danish IUCN National Committee had invited Chris Mahon, Chief Executive of the IUCN National Committee for the United Kingdom, to a seminar to share experiences from the UK's Putting Nature on the Map project (Crofts et al., 2014). This project was initiated by the IUCN National Committee of the United Kingdom in 2011 and has similar objectives to the current project.

However, in spring 2018 after a debate in the media on the quality of Danish Conservation Areas reported to the European Environment Agency (EEA), the then Danish Minister for Environment and Food requested IUCN to review the Conservation Areas according to IUCN's criteria. The Danish National Committee then offered to do the full review, by involving the Danish members of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA). In June 2018, the offer was accepted, and the work began. This project complemented the National Committee's goal on using the guidelines to improve the management of protected areas.

The debate in the media was rooted in a review from 2009/10 which looked at 1,843 Conservation Areas, a specific type of protected nature area (in Danish called *Fredninger*). Since the Danish Nature Protection Act came into force in 1917, these Conservation Areas have been a key tool in protecting nature in Denmark. They are the oldest and most comprehensive tool for the protection of flora and fauna, landscapes and cultural

values and today cover about five per cent of Denmark's terrestrial area. The 2009/10 review was carried out by the then Danish Agency for Spatial and Environmental Planning and the IUCN Management Guidelines were applied. The data was submitted to the EEA which collects data on protected areas from the member countries of the European Union. The EEA then submits the data to the UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre to be included in the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA, Protected Planet). The data in the WDPA are provided by governments and used to estimate whether aspects of Aichi Target 11, under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), are fulfilled. Aichi Target 11 overall states: "By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, are protected..."1 (CBD Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, 2010). The WDPA data is also used in three indicators for the UN Sustainable Development Goals 14 and 15, as well as the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). With the international goals and targets reported in the Protected Planet Report series (UNEP-WCMC, IUCN & NGS, 2018; UNEP-WCMC & IUCN, 2016), there is a rising awareness among governments that the reporting is important (Gannon et al., 2017).

From June to November 2018, the IUCN National Committee of Denmark undertook the project on behalf of the Danish Environmental Protection Agency to assess the Conservation Areas and identify the areas where the main objective is conserving nature and thereafter, if the area fulfils the definition of protected areas. If these requirements were met, the areas were assigned the appropriate IUCN Management Category for Protected Areas. The Conservation Areas are protected according to Chapter 6 of the Danish Nature Protection Act, and this project is the first of its kind in Denmark to thoroughly review a type of protected area to identify whether it meets the IUCN definition of a protected area and its underpinning Management Categories.

The project was carried out by a group led by two Danish members of WCPA. The project team also consisted of Danish members of the IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management and IUCN Species Survival Commission, as well as a specialist within the field of cultural history and other experts in biodiversity and nature management. The project owner was the IUCN National Committee of Denmark and only the Chair of the National Committee was actively involved by overseeing the project and corresponding with the Danish Environmental Protection Agency. None of the other National Committee members were involved in the execution of the project. This governance structure made it possible for the National Committee members to freely comment on the results when they were made available. Furthermore, Andrej Sovinc, WCPA Vice-Chair for Europe, and Trevor Sandwith, Director of the IUCN Global Protected Areas Programme, were also consulted prior to the project to ensure endorsement from WCPA, and the IUCN Secretariat respectively.

METHOD

The Danish Environmental Protection Agency provided a list of 1,720 Conservation Areas to be assessed over a period of 10 weeks. The project was designed as a desktop study. The assessments were initially started by surveying content found in the declarations gathered electronically from the national register of declarations for Conservation Areas. The declarations were then compared with information that could be accessed electronically in the Danish Natural Environmental Portal (the official portal to data on nature and environment in Denmark) or other relevant online portals from the Danish Environmental Protection Agency. This could, for example, be information on land -use, biodiversity index values or areas of National Geological Interest. It is important to note that the municipalities are the authorities for most of the Conservation Areas in Denmark. Therefore, for private and municipal-owned Conservation Areas further searches were made about the dedication, management, nature content, etc. on the municipalities' websites as well as through general searches on management, care, ownership, etc.

This review used the revised IUCN Best Practice Guidelines to assign IUCN management categories (Dudley et al., 2013). At the start of the project, an assessment sheet (in Danish) was prepared, based on these IUCN Guidelines. To ensure a uniform assessment, test assessments were made for a number of Conservation Areas by the main assessors in the project group. In addition to making assessments, the two WCPA members also carried out quality checks of the other assessors' assessments for each Conservation Area in order to ensure that the IUCN Guidelines were followed in all aspects. Specialist knowledge on geology, cultural history and ecosystem services provided supplementary assessments of selected Conservation Areas.

For each assessment, the first step was to identify if the main goal of the Conservation Area was, in fact, nature protection. This could seem irrelevant, but for many Conservation Areas, the aim of protecting a specific area was not always clear, especially in old declarations, so it was necessary to dig deeper into the protection declaration to find the actual goal. If a Conservation Area was considered to have nature protection as a main goal, the Conservation Area was assessed according to the following nine parameters originating from IUCN's definition on protected areas:

- 1. A clearly defined geographical space
- 2. Recognised
- 3. Dedicated
- 4. Managed
- 5. Protected through legal or other effective means
- 6. Long-term nature conservation
- 7. Nature exists in the area (biodiversity, geodiversity, landscape)
- 8. Associated ecosystem services
- 9. Protection of cultural values (if present).

If one of the mentioned parameters was not fulfilled the Conservation Area could not be regarded as fulfilling the IUCN definition for protected areas and therefore could not be assigned an IUCN Management Category. With regard to associated ecosystem services, the evaluation was restricted to outdoor recreation, tourism development, ground water protection and fishery because these parameters were the most profound. For cultural values the analysis was restricted to cultural history in the landscape, especially ancient monuments.

During the execution of the project, valuable advice was received from Nigel Dudley, main author of the IUCN Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories (Dudley, 2008; Dudley et al., 2013). A description of the project was provided in English to ensure that the basic interpretations by the Danish experts were in line with the IUCN Guidelines. In addition, advice was sought for 16 specific Conservation Areas each representing a principal question with regard to the fulfilment of the IUCN definition of protected areas and the assignment of an IUCN Management Category.

RESULTS

An in-depth project review and method of assessments can be found in the published report (in Danish) that was completed for the Danish Environmental Protection Agency (Woollhead & Petersen, 2018).

The main conclusion from the project is that 378 Conservation Areas from the list provided by the Danish Environmental Protection Agency could be assigned an IUCN Management Category based on the desktop analysis alone. This is to be seen in contrast to the 1,843 areas assigned IUCN categories in 2009. It refers only to the number of areas. (Table 1).

It is important to note that the Conservation Areas in the two lists (from 2009/10 and 2018 respectively) are not consistent in that not all areas assigned a category in the 2009/10 review occur in the 2018 list of areas and vice versa. Some Conservation Areas have been removed from the 2018 list and new Conservation Areas have been added as compared to the 2009/10 list. Furthermore, a number of marine Conservation Areas have been added to the 2018 list which were not present in the 2009/10 list.

There is no spatial overlap between the individual Conservation Areas in the same list, barring minor errors which are of no significance here. In order to answer the question on how this project's results compared to the assessments in 2009/10, the Conservation Areas for the two reviews have been sorted

Table 1. Conservation Areas which have been assigned with an IUCN Management Category for Protected Areas in
2009/10 and 2018 respectively

IUCN Categories	2009/10	2018	Difference
la Strict Nature Reserve	6	5	- 1
Ib Wilderness Area	7	0	- 7
II National Park	9	3	- 6
III Natural Monument	20	16	- 4
IV Habitat/Species Management Area	204	242	+ 38
V Protected Landscape/Seascape	1,597	111	- 1,468
VI Protected Area with Sustainable use of Natural Resources	0	1	+1
Assigned with an IUCN category	1,843	378	
Total number of Conservation Areas	1,843	1,720	





Figure 1. Assignment of Conservation Areas to IUCN categories in 2009/10 and 2018 based on sites assessed in both time periods

in such a way that only the areas which were included in both reviews are compared (Figure 1).

The main difference in the results from the two reviews was firstly due to a different position at the onset. In the 2009/10 review, if an area was protected according to the Danish Nature Protection Act Chapter 6, it was assessed to fulfill the IUCN criteria of a protected area without a thorough assessment. In the 2018 review, it was assessed if an area could fulfil the basic IUCN criteria for a protected area, and if it could, then it would be assigned an IUCN Management Category.

Other reasons why Conservation Areas in the 2018 review were not assigned with IUCN Management Categories include:

- if the main goal was to preserve viewpoints, recreational areas, cultural sites, or aesthetic landscapes;
- if an area did not have strong legal regulations fulfilling the protection goals in the specific declaration of the area;
- if there was a lack of management plans or other proof of management taking place.

Looking at the areas assigned with an IUCN Management Category in both reviews, the main difference is the Conservation Areas which were previously assigned to Category V (Protected Landscapes) have now been assigned to Category IV (Protected Habitat and Species Areas). The reason for this is that Category V is intended for larger natural areas, which the previous review did not weigh as a factor. The present management of many of the areas includes goals on protecting specific habitats or species and therefore could instead justify the assignment to Category IV. Figures 2 to 4 are examples of Conservation Areas that have been assessed in both periods with the result of the assessment indicated in the caption.

The number of Conservation Areas within the less common categories (i.e. within IUCN Management Categories Ia, Ib and II) were fewer in the 2018 review compared to the 2009/10 review. No Conservation Areas have been assigned Category Ib (Wilderness Areas) in the 2018 review, due to the fact that the Danish landscape in general is too influenced by people. The number of Conservation Areas that belong to Category III (Natural Monument) is the same in both reviews but some of the categorised areas are different. It should also be mentioned that in 2009/10, the IUCN Management Category VI (Protected Areas with Sustainable use of Natural Resources) was new and therefore not widely used. In 2018, one Conserved Area at sea was assigned to Category VI. Examples of



Figure 2. Æbelø and the surrounding sea territory are an example of a Conservation Area which in this assessment is assessed as managed under the category National Park (II) without, however, being designated as a national park. The area comprising 3,000 ha was previously reported under Category IV © Anette Petersen.



Figure 3. The hills of Veddinge are protected as a Conservation Area to preserve the landscape as a whole with its geological values that include part of the glacial series, i.e. continuous landscape elements formed in front of an advancing glacier during the last Ice Age. The area was previously reported under Category IV but has in this project been assessed as Category V © Anette Petersen.



Figure 4. The coastal cliffs of Nordmors and the hinterland are a Conservation Area protecting the landscape and scientific values. The area was reported under Category II during the reporting in 2009/10. In this review it has been assessed as a Natural Monument (Category III) © Anette Petersen.

Conservation Areas that changed designation in this comparison across time are given in Figures 2 to 4.

DISCUSSION

The review found that 22 per cent of the Conservation Areas assessed fulfilled the IUCN definition of a protected area. Because the review was based on a desktop study there were limitations to accessing data. It may well be that information on one or more parameters may not be publicly available through websites and databases. A number of Conservation Areas could be found to be fulfilling the IUCN definition of protected areas and be assigned an IUCN Management Category if more data were available. This was not possible to do during the present study, but could have been obtained by, for example, direct contact the municipalities responsible for with their management. In all, 291 sites were not accepted as protected areas due to a lack of information on management. This means that up to 30 per cent of the Conservation Areas could possibly have been assigned an IUCN Management Category if more in-depth data were available.

It is important to note that although many Conservation Areas have not been assigned an IUCN Management Category, it does not mean that these areas are not valuable to Danish nature. Many of the Conservation Areas are areas with a cultural purpose including a natural content. However, as their main goal is cultural and not nature protection, they cannot be categorised as protected areas on the basis of the IUCN definition. It could be useful to undertake a review of 'other effective area based conservation measures' (OECMs) for those areas that do not meet the IUCN Management Categories when the OECM guidelines are available.

Furthermore, it should be noted that Denmark (via the EEA) not only reports Conservation Areas in the World Database on Protected Areas. Denmark also reports Article 3 Protected Nature - these areas are protected by the Danish Nature Protection Act (Chapter 2) under Article 3 protecting all natural habitats above a certain size such as moor, meadows, heather, lakes, rivers, grassland, and salt marshes; as well as National Parks and Natura 2000 sites. Data on sites designated under international conventions and agreements, such as Ramsar, OSPAR, HELCOM and UNESCO World Heritage are also in the WDPA but are reported on by the relevant convention secretariats. Therefore, the results in this project only partially contribute to an updated report from Denmark according to IUCN's criteria for protected areas. It should also be highlighted that so far no assessments have been made on natural sites owned by foundations and other non-state actors.

There are both pros and cons of a desktop study. The pros are that this type of study can be completed in a relatively short time and requires relatively few resources. In this project, the assessments are carried out solely for Conservation Areas, but in principle they can be carried out for all types of protected nature. The cons are that information may be unavailable online, for example, there may be areas that are well-managed but do not have a management plan or similar available online. In such cases, the areas will not be accepted as fulfilling the IUCN criteria. In turn however, this may prompt better communication on the management of a protected area, for example, by being communicated on a website for the benefit of the public, thereby raising awareness of the protection that is taking place.

Nevertheless, the exercise highlighted the need for a more thorough review of sites before reporting to the EEA database. It can be completed relatively quickly by using a standardised method based on the IUCN Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories and could easily apply to other countries as well which have signed the CBD and wants to reach the global goals of at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas.

CONCLUSION

As time and resources are often limited, new ways of reporting on national protected areas as part of international conservation commitments can be beneficial. Denmark has, like many other parties, signed the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and has been requested to report to the World Database on Protected Areas on its national status for protected areas. The IUCN Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories are globally recognised and referenced in WDPA.

This project has shown that an assessment can be completed relatively quickly by using a standardised method based on the IUCN Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories. Although there are limitations with desktop reviews, they can be a useful option for countries who have limited time to update their data and/or want to improve their reporting to the WDPA, and thereby improve their



The protected area Agerø, Skibsted Fjord in Thy, North Jutland, Denmark is the first area to be assessed as the IUCN Management Category VI. The sea area constitutes a common good with the utilisation of the natural resource while ensuring a high nature content. Local communities can fish with nets in the area and hunt as part of a sustainable use of resources. © Morten Rasmussen.

assessment on reaching Aichi Target 11, as well as Sustainable Development Goals 14 and 15 (Gannon et al., 2017). For each single area not fulfilling the definition, the assessment indirectly gives advice on how to improve the protection.

This project has also shown how an IUCN National Committee, together with IUCN Commission members and with support from IUCN-WCPA and the IUCN Secretariat, can be part of the reviewing process of protected areas. In the IUCN Guidelines for Applying Management Categories to Protected Areas, it reads "One option would be to have a national task force reviewing data on protected areas and it has been suggested that a national committee for IUCN might be an obvious vehicle for this" (Dudley et al., 2013, p. 40).

The Danish IUCN National Committee will continue with the initial idea of producing a manual for the IUCN Guidelines in Danish and is prepared to assist with applying the IUCN Management Categories on other types of protected areas in Denmark. It is hoped that this review will act as an example of how such an assessment can be made easier and quicker. It is also hoped that the review can be used as an example for other countries wanting to apply the IUCN Management Categories and subsequently report to the WDPA.

The Danish Environment Protection Agency has publically announced that it will follow the results from this review when reporting to the WDPA in 2019 (Miljøstyrelsen, 2018).

ENDNOTES

¹Target 11: By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective areabased conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscape and seascape.

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A common Danish type of Conservation Area whose main purpose is the preservation of a view—here it is the view from the road along a prominent elongated hill in Lumsås over the Bay of Sejerø, Odsherred, Northwest Zealand, Denmark. © Anette Petersen

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RESUMEN

Como a menudo el tiempo y los recursos son limitados, podría ser ventajoso contar con nuevas formas para informar sobre áreas protegidas nacionales como parte de los compromisos internacionales de conservación. Dinamarca, como muchas otras partes, firmó el Convenio sobre la Diversidad Biológica (CDB) y se le pidió que informara a la Base de Datos Mundial sobre Áreas Protegidas (WDPA, por sus siglas en inglés) sobre el estatus nacional de sus áreas protegidas. Las directrices de la UICN para la aplicación de las categorías de gestión de las áreas protegidas son reconocidas a nivel mundial y figuran en la WDPA. En 2018, el Comité Nacional danés de la UICN emprendió un proyecto en nombre de la Agencia Danesa de Protección Ambiental para evaluar un tipo específico de áreas protegidas en Dinamarca llamadas Áreas de Conservación e identificar a cuáles de estas áreas se les podría asignar categorías de gestión de la UICN. El proyecto consistió en una revisión de escritorio y concluyó que el 22% de las Áreas de Conservación evaluadas se ajustaban a la definición de la UICN de área protegida. Este proyecto ha demostrado que se puede hacer una evaluación relativamente rápida mediante el uso de un método estandarizado, y aunque existen limitaciones en lo que a revisiones de escritorio se refiere, podrían ser una opción útil para los países que desean mejorar la presentación de sus informes a la WDPA.

RÉSUMÉ

Le temps et les ressources étant souvent limités, il parait bénéfique d'adopter des nouvelles méthodes de communication des données relatives aux aires protégées nationales dans le cadre des engagements internationaux en matière de conservation. Le Danemark, de même que d'autres pays ayant signé la Convention sur la diversité biologique, est tenu de faire un rapport sur le statut de ses aires protégées à la Base de données mondiale sur les aires protégées (connue sous l'acronyme anglais WDPA). Les lignes directrices de l'UICN pour l'application des catégories de gestion des aires protégées sont mondialement reconnues et référencées dans la WDPA. En 2018, le Comité national danois de l'UICN a entrepris, pour le compte de l'Agence danoise pour la protection de l'environnement, un projet visant à évaluer un type spécifique d'aire protégée au Danemark, dite 'Aire de Conservation', et à identifier lesquelles de ces aires pourraient être classées dans les catégories de gestion de l'UICN. Le projet qui consistait en un étude documentaire assistée par ordinateur, a révélé que 22% des Aires de Conservation évaluées correspondaient à la définition d'aires protégées de l'UICN. Ce projet a montré qu'une évaluation peut être effectuée relativement rapidement à l'aide d'une méthode normalisée. Bien que les examens assistés par ordinateur aient des limites, ils peuvent donc constituer une option utile pour les pays qui souhaitent améliorer l'efficacité de leurs rapports à la WDPA.