



# Procedure for Handling Petitions against Current Listings on *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*<sup>™</sup>

Version 4 (June 2024)

Prepared by the IUCN Red List Standards and Petitions Committee



This document is prepared by the IUCN Red List Standards and Petitions Committee in collaboration with the IUCN Red List Unit and approved by the IUCN Red List Scientific Committee.

The document is Annex 5 of the “Rules of Procedure for IUCN Red List Assessments”.

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Cover photo: Green Turtle *Chelonia mydas* © Xanthe Rivett.

# **Procedure for Handling of Petitions against Current Listings on *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*™. Version 4 (12 June 2024)**

## ***Introduction***

Assessments published on *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*™ are open to challenge. Petitions may be made against current listings of species, subspecies, varieties or geographic subpopulations (hereinafter referred to as taxa). Petitions against historical listings (i.e., those that have since been updated with a new listing for the taxon in question) are not considered. Petitions may only be made on the basis of the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria: Version 3.1 (<https://www.iucnredlist.org/resources/categories-and-criteria>) and in reference to any supporting information accompanying the listing. It is not possible to change listings for political, emotional, economic, or other reasons not based on the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria.

## ***Disagreements with Current Listings***

Any party may contact the IUCN Red List Unit (RLU) at any time to express disagreement with any current listing. If this disagreement is based on scientific or technical grounds, the RLU will check with the party and the relevant Red List Authority (RLA) Coordinator, appropriate person nominated by the RLA Coordinator or Assessor/s (in the absence of an RLA) [hereafter referred to as RLA] whether they have already discussed the listing to try to resolve the issue. The process will proceed in one of the following ways:

- i) In the event of a disagreement concerning the listing of a species that is in the process of being reassessed, the RLA will seek to involve the party expressing disagreement in the reassessment process, with the objective of reaching consensus on the new listing.
- ii) If both parties have already spent at least 4 weeks discussing the listing and have failed to resolve the disagreement, a formal petition may be submitted.
- iii) If no discussions have taken place, the RLU will put this party in contact with the relevant RLA with intention of resolving the disagreement without entering a formal petition process.

The RLU will check-in on discussions 4 weeks after initial notification of the disagreement. If an agreement has been reached during discussions, one of the following actions will happen:

- i) The assessment remains unchanged on the Red List website.
- ii) The taxon is reassessed and the new assessment is submitted for publication in the next available Red List update.
- iii) The RLU creates a corrected assessment to replace the current published assessment in the next available Red List update.

If both parties request more time for discussions, this will be granted (to a maximum of 4 weeks). The RLU will again check-in on progress at the end of the extended discussion period.

If no agreement is reached after discussions, the party disagreeing with the assessment may then file a formal petition against the assessment.

## ***The Formal Petitions Process***

If the above process is not successful in resolving the disagreement, a formal petition may be submitted. The flow diagram in [Annex 1](#) presents a summary of the formal petitions process; the process is described in detail below.

A formal petition should be brief (eight (8) pages maximum), and should summarise the points of disagreement, with explicit reference to the IUCN Red List Category and Criteria under which the species is listed. (See "General Principles" below for acceptable content of this and all other documents submitted during the petitions process.) The steps to follow for filing petitions are outlined below:

### ***Petition submission and validation***

- 1) Formal petitions must be submitted directly to the RLU ([redlist@iucn.org](mailto:redlist@iucn.org)). The RLU will acknowledge receipt of the petition and will inform the petitioner of the date on which the petition was received; this is the formal petition **start date**.
- 2) The RLU will consult with the IUCN Red List Standards and Petitions Committee (SPC) to determine whether the petition has been filed on the basis of the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria. This will result in one of the following outcomes:
  - a) **Petition disallowed:** if the petition has not been made on the basis of the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria, it will be returned to the petitioner by the RLU with an explanation as to why the petition cannot be considered. This response will be sent to the petitioner within 4 weeks of the [start date](#), and the RLA will be informed.
  - b) **Petition allowed:** if the petition is allowed to proceed, the process will move on to [step 3](#). In the IUCN Species Information Service (SIS; the IUCN Red List data management system) and on the IUCN Red List website, the assessment will be flagged as 'petitioned'. The details of the petition will be added to the [Petitions](#) page under the list of 'current petitions'.

### ***Discussion between the parties***

- 3) If the petition is allowed by the SPC, the RLU will send the petition to the RLA . Within 4 weeks of the [start date](#), the RLU will request the RLA and the petitioner to discuss the formal petition with the objective of reaching an agreement between them. If the petitioner and RLA agree that discussions have already taken place and failed to reach a resolution, the petition can move to the next stage without additional discussions. Otherwise, the RLA and the petitioner will be given 8 weeks from the date that the RLU refers the petition to them to reach agreement.

In seeking to reach agreement, the RLA and the petitioner should discuss the issues outlined in the formal petition letter. They should determine whether they are using the same underlying data. They should clarify whether the disagreements are due to factual discrepancies, as opposed to differences of either interpretation or application of the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria.

- 4) If the RLA agrees with the petition, or if the petitioner and the RLA come to an agreement, the petitioner must request the RLU to halt the petition and to action one of the following outcomes:

- a) The original assessment remains unchanged. The 'petitioned' flag will be removed from the assessment in SIS and will be removed from the published assessment on the IUCN Red List website.
  - b) The taxon is reassessed and the new assessment is submitted for publication in the next available Red List update.
  - c) The RLU creates a corrected assessment to bring minor modifications into the assessment, while keeping the original Red List category and criteria. The corrected assessment will replace the original published assessment in the next available Red List update.
- 5) If the petitioner and the RLA are unable to agree within the time period set in [step 3](#), the petition will then enter [step 6](#) in the process.

### ***Justification preparation and submission***

- 6) At the end of the time period set in [step 3](#) (and if no agreement has been reached), the RLU will notify both the petitioner and the RLA that each of them should submit justifications for their case to the SPC via the RLU. The justifications should reach the RLU within 16 weeks from the date that the RLU issues this notification. The justifications must follow the guidelines below:
- a) Justifications must be submitted electronically as PDF files to the RLU contact handling the petition; paper files cannot be considered.
  - b) They must not be longer than eight (8) pages of A4, excluding the list of references (i.e., if printed double-sided, the main justification text should be within four sheets of A4 paper).
  - c) All text must use Arial font, 12-point.
  - d) All relevant available data to support the argument must be included.
  - e) They must include a synopsis of the failed negotiations, a brief statement of the reasons for the dispute, and a clarification of any factual discrepancies (e.g., different sources of data or information used).
  - f) All data used in the justifications must either be referenced to publications that are available in the public domain, or else be made available to the SPC. The data provided should be clearly linked to the use of the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria. See "General Principles" below for acceptable content of this and all other documents submitted during the petitions process.
  - g) If the petitioner fails to submit a justification within the set time period and in the required format, the petition will be dropped, and the RLU will inform the SPC of this. If the RLA fails to submit a justification within the set time period and in the required format, the petition will go forward.
  - h) Requests for an extension to the deadline for submitting justifications will not normally be considered, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Any request for such an extension should be submitted to the RLU at least 2 weeks before the deadline, who will refer it to the Chair of the IUCN Red List Scientific Committee (RLSC). Generally, the maximum time limit to any requested delay is 4 weeks, with only one such request being considered from each party. However, in unusual circumstances, such as multiple petitions directed to the same RLA, a longer extension may be granted, at the discretion of the Chair of the RLSC.

- 7) The RLU will send the justifications from each party to the other at the end of the time period set in [step 6](#), or within 1 week of both justifications having been received. Both parties have 3 weeks in which to provide a 1-page addendum to their justifications, should they choose to do so. Any addendums received after the three-week period will not be considered. The parties may not make any changes to the original justifications.
- 8) At the end of this 3-week period, whether or not an addendum is received, the RLU will send the justifications to all members of the SPC for review and confidential comment. The SPC may choose to circulate the justifications to other independent expert reviewers for confidential comments. The Chair of the SPC should, if at all possible, receive these comments within 8 weeks of the date of receipt of the justifications. If needed, the SPC may seek clarification of particular issues from the RLA and the petitioner. The SPC may seek reviews from external experts to assist its deliberations. In instances in which the RLA failed to submit a justification, the SPC will make every effort to obtain a balanced set of confidential comments from reviewers.

### ***Deliberation and ruling***

- 9) The SPC will consider the justifications and the confidential reviews. It will make a ruling on each petition within 16 weeks from the time that the justifications were circulated to the SPC by the RLU. In the case of multiple petitions, a longer period may be granted, at the discretion of the Chair of the RLSC. The SPC will issue a notification that will include a full rationale and explanation of each ruling, but will not include a record of the deliberations that the SPC made to reach its decision, and the names of any reviewers will be kept confidential. The SPC will send this notification to the RLU.

### ***Notification and publication of final ruling***

- 10) Upon receipt of the SPC's notification, the RLU will send this to both the petitioner and the RLA. Any changes will appear in the next available update of *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*<sup>™</sup>. The notification of the ruling on any petition, and any resulting change in listing, will be placed on the IUCN Red List website.

### ***Petitions against listings based on an old version of The IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria***

If a formal petition is made against a listing based on an old version of the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria, and the petition is based on the Categories and Criteria, then the RLA in question will first be requested to update the listing so that it is based on the current version of the categories and criteria. The RLA will be given 24 weeks to do this from the original receipt of the formal petition by the RLU. The RLA should consider the additional information provided by the petitioner. Once the RLA has updated the listing, the petitioner will be so informed and asked whether or not they wish to proceed with the petition against the new listing. If the RLA fails to meet this deadline for updating the listing, the petition will proceed according to the process outlined in steps 6–10 above, and the ruling of the SPC will provide an updated listing for the taxon in question, using the current version of the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria.



## **General Principles**

*Acknowledging Communications.* During the formal petitions process, the petitioner, the RLA, the SPC, and the RLU should acknowledge the receipt of all correspondence among them as soon as possible after arrival, so that any failure in delivery is detected as early as possible.

*Confidentiality.* While a formal petition is being considered, the associated documents (including justifications made by the petitioner and the RLA) are confidential documents that are not made available to third parties. The SPC will circulate these documents only to independent expert reviewers who agree to adhere to the confidentiality of the process and accept that their reviews will eventually be made public, but not attributed. The SPC's notification may include, or quote from, any of the documents submitted by the RLA or the petitioner in the context of a petition, and the reviews (without the names of the reviewers). Prior to SPC's ruling, the petitioner, the RLA, and any third parties connected to the petitioner or the RLA will not mention the petition in any public forum (including scientific publications, social media, the press, blogs, podcasts, etc.) unless accompanied by the following explanation: "IUCN has allowed this petition to proceed, which only means that the petition is based on the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria; it does not in any way imply that the petition has merit. Only the final ruling signifies IUCN's position on the petition."

*Conduct.* As SSC members, members of the RLA are expected to follow the [Code of Conduct for IUCN Commissions](#). If there is an allegation that this code has been violated by the RLA of the taxon being petitioned, the petition will be put on hold (and the petition process paused) until this allegation is resolved following IUCN's established procedures. The petitioner and assessor/s, if not members of an IUCN Commission, are expected to follow the relevant stipulations of the *Code of Conduct for IUCN Commissions* such as integrity, professionalism, and mutual respect.

If the RLU determines that either party has not met the above expectations regarding confidentiality and conduct, the SSC Chair, in consultation with the RLU, RLSC, and SPC, will determine an appropriate response, which may include one or more of the following: (i) the petitioner or the RLA is required to take specific corrective action; (ii) the petition is dropped; (iii) the composition of the RLA is changed; (iv) the RLA is dismissed from responding to the petition and another expert or group of experts is appointed to respond to the petition; and/or (v) if there is a determination that a conflict of interest has affected the assessment, the assessment is 'removed' from the IUCN Red List website at the next update of the Red List, the petition is dropped, and the RLA is required to submit a new assessment.

*Content of documents.* The documents provided by both sides in the context of a petition (initial petition, justifications, and addenda) must focus on information relevant to the listing of the taxon under the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria, and associated guidelines. These documents should exclude information such as:

- ecological and biological information not relevant to the IUCN Red List Criteria;
- the consequences of the current Red List status of a species for the species itself or for any stakeholders;
- the consequences of a possible change in the Red List status of a species for the species itself or for any stakeholders;
- the expertise, credentials, motivations, intentions, institutional affiliations, past or current activities, or any other attributes of the petitioners or the RLA;
- any legal, social, ethical, economical, or moral issues or arguments.

Furthermore, the SPC does not consider any supporting or opposing views or opinions from parties other than the petitioner, the assessor, and any experts that the SPC chooses to consult on the matter.

*Repeated petitions.* In order to prevent continuing petitions on the same species, the SPC will only allow a new petition if it is based on new information.

*Reassessment of a species following a petition.* The first time that a species is reassessed following a petition, the reassessment will be reviewed by the SPC.

*Impartiality.* The RLSC and the RLU are responsible for ensuring that the process for handling petitions is adhered to, and that evaluations of petitions are carried out professionally and impartially. Prior to publishing the ruling on a petition, the Chair of the SPC will send a brief report to the Chair of the RLSC confirming that the above process was followed to reach the decision or will outline any deviations from the process that had to be made. The RLSC (excluding the SPC), the IUCN SSC Steering Committee, the IUCN SSC Chair, and the IUCN Secretariat (including the staff of the Red List Unit), have no rights to intervene in the petitions process, or to involve themselves in the substance of any petition.

### ***Special Cases***

*Deviations from the Process.* Every effort will be made to avoid deviations from the process as laid out, above. However, any petitions requiring such deviations should be approved in advance by the Chair of the RLSC.

*Complaints about the Petitions Process.* If there is an assertion that the above procedure has been violated, then a formal and documented complaint may be submitted to the IUCN SSC Chair.



# Annex 1: Flow Diagram of Formal Red List Petitions Process

- All timelines noted in the diagram below are based on the deadlines outlined in the petitions process. Actual timelines will depend on response times and requests for deadline extensions. Please refer to the petitions process document for details.
- Figures noted within the diagram refer to the steps outlined in the petitions process document (see *The Formal Petitions Process*).

