

Guidance for chapters on SCB's policy approval process

If your chapter wishes to issue a policy statement or engage in a particular policy initiative, or if you would like the North America Section to issue a given statement that your chapter has initiated, you must follow SCB's policy approval process. This policy was established by the Board of Governors of the global Society, and is applicable to all regional sections and chapters.

There are several reasons for this requirement. SCB is a large organization (more than 10,000 members in more than 150 countries), and it is important to manage, monitor, and assure relative consistency on the full range of priorities and activities of SCB's groups (regional sections, working groups, chapters, and so forth). Policies that may have a strong scientific foundation in one geographic area or ecosystem may not have a strong foundation everywhere. SCB's Board is responsible for the role and style of the organization in the policy arena, and the Section and chapters are an important part of the organization. Among other things, SCB tries to ensure that policy involvement, positions, or statements of its component groups either do not conflict or that differences are explained clearly. SCB also aims to ensure that representations by the units of SCB are reflective of and consistent with the organization's approach to policy. Decision makers and the public are unlikely to distinguish among a policy position issued by chapters, sections, or the global organization, and disclaimers or conditional statements (e.g., "perspectives represented herein are those of the North Dakota Section and not necessarily those of other SCB groups") will be disregarded by policy makers and the media. Further, SCB is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. The Internal Revenue Service has strict rules regarding policy involvement of nonprofits and it is essential that SCB follow those rules or risk losing its nonprofit status. The IRS does not distinguish among functional units of the organization when applying its rules. The actions of a single chapter could jeopardize the status of the entire organization.

At its core, SCB is a professional, scientific society. Many organizations assert that they are "science-based" and effect their activities with a scientific basis. However, SCB is a society focused on conservation science and its application to solving environmental problems. This distinguishes SCB by giving us a higher level of scientific credibility in the eyes of decision makers, and differentiates us from conservation NGOs or organizations whose primary mission is advocacy (see the February 2007 issue of *Conservation Biology* for a special section illustrating the range of views on advocacy among our professional colleagues). SCB holds no position for or against advocacy, including advocacy by individual SCB members. However, in advancing the cause of biological conservation, it is essential that **SCB as an organization** occupies a specific, well-defined, and extremely valuable niche as a scientific society. Our effectiveness as an organization at influencing conservation policy depends on our strength within that niche. Thus SCB as a rule does not join coalitions of conservation NGOs (even though we may agree with their position). These organizations occupy a different and no less important niche. With extremely rare exception, SCB does not endorse position statements prepared by other organizations unless members of the Society have been involved directly in development of the statement and it has undergone SCB's policy review process

Many elected and appointed representatives of SCB have worked together to develop a policy process that ensures essential oversight yet is not unduly controlling or restrictive. Review of

policy statements and positions is most likely to be expedited, and your statement or position is most likely to be accepted, if the statement is

- Based on science published in *Conservation Biology*, other peer-reviewed journals, or white papers approved by SCB or its regional sections.
- Consistent with the strategic policy priorities of SCB or the North America Section. A description of SCB's policy priorities can be read at www.conbio.org/activities/policy/Priorities.cfm. At the level of the North America Section, priority will be given to responses to published materials (e.g., petitions to list species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, draft recovery plans, or proposed changes to existing federal regulations) and to issues of national or continental relevance.
- Written in clear, objective language that is grounded in science and appropriate for conservation researchers, managers, and policy makers. Please avoid hyperbole

To request approval of a policy statement or involvement in an issue that your chapter hopes to endorse or would like the Section to endorse, submit the draft position to the Section's President, Erica Fleishman (fleishman@nceas.ucsb.edu), with a brief cover letter that provides background and context. Please also send a copy of the position and cover letter to the Section's policy intern, Kristin Carden (carden@lifesci.ucsb.edu), and include "SCB" in the subject line.

If your desired position or statement meets the three fundamental criteria listed above, you will be notified of its acceptance, acceptance pending revision, or rejection within two business days of submission. A rapid decision on your issue also may be rendered if its subject is highly time-sensitive and critical to SCB's mission and goals.

If your request does not meet the three criteria listed above, it may be reviewed by independent scientists or practitioners at the request of the Section president. You will be notified of acceptance, acceptance pending revision, or rejection within 11 business days of submission.

SCB fully understands that the process or criteria described above may not be ideal for all members or all chapters. The organization has a long-standing (and generally healthy) tension between advocacy and academic pursuits and there are strong opinions on all sides. The role of SCB's governing body, and of this policy process, is to ensure that the organization as a whole remains strong, differentiated, consistent, and effective while enabling as much action and accomplishment on the part of its individual chapters and sections as possible.

A full description of the policy approval process is at www.conbio.org/Activities/Policy/