



*Creating Solutions for People and Nature*

**IUCN Regional Conservation Forum  
for Europe, North & Central Asia**

14-16 December 2015 | Helsinki, Finland

## Message from Helsinki

### IUCN Regional Conservation Forum for Europe, North & Central Asia, 16 December 2015

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As the world's oldest and largest global environmental organization, with over 1,230 government and non-governmental Members supported by over 15,000 experts in 185 countries, the vision of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (hereafter IUCN) is to achieve "a just world that values and conserves nature".

Therefore, the IUCN Regional Conservation Forum for Europe, North and Central Asia was held on 14-16 December 2015 in Helsinki, Finland and delivered the following message in preparation for the IUCN World Conservation Congress, to be held in Hawai'i, USA on 1-10 September 2016:

Recognizing the unity of the biosphere, the interdependence of all its components and that humanity is a part of nature;

Deeply conscious of the need to respect all lifeforms and that nature, as the life support system of Earth, needs to be maintained through the conservation of nature and the sustainable use of natural resources as a precondition for sustainable development;

Alarmed by the level of current pressures and threats to biodiversity and ecosystems induced by population growth, overexploitation of natural resources, consequences of armed conflicts, rapid urbanization, land conversion, negative impacts of the extractive industry, soil degradation, pollution, invasive alien species, habitat degradation and destruction, and unsustainable consumption and production patterns which are inherent to the current development paradigm threatening to breach planetary boundaries;

Also alarmed at the persistent reduction of available resources for conservation and restoration;

Acknowledging that the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change constitute critical steps toward more mainstream actions that are critical for increasing resilience;

Welcoming the integration of the environmental, social and economic dimensions in the Agenda 2030 and recognizing the need to eradicate poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development;

Affirming the importance of the Rule of Law, human rights and good governance at all levels in order to implement, enforce and monitor compliance with environmental obligations;

Aware of the special leadership role that Europe, North and Central Asia have to play at the global level in the implementation of the Agenda 2030;

Highlighting the particular role of the entire region in global ocean governance, having the largest marine domain in the world, from the Arctic to the Antarctic and across the tropics, including the EU Overseas;

Also acknowledging the critical role the European Union plays in the global conservation and sustainable development as the major donor of development aid and a leader in international agreements and processes;

Acknowledging biodiversity values and the scale of ecosystem services that Eastern European and Central Asian landscapes provide to society as a whole;

Contributing to the IUCN World Conservation Congress and providing sustainable and equitable solutions to the current challenges faced by our planet;

IUCN members and experts present at the European, North and Central Asian Conservation Forum issue this 'Message from Helsinki' as an input to the IUCN World Conservation Congress;

The Message from Helsinki comes at a critical time for acting on nature conservation and the ecologically sustainable use of natural resources at both European, North and Central Asian, regional and global levels;

The Message from Helsinki brings together the main outcomes of the Regional Conservation Forum and calls for further strengthened collaboration between all actors;

The Message from Helsinki urges all actors to take all necessary actions to halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services, to invest in cost-effective nature-based solutions for climate change adaptation and mitigation and for ecologically sustainable development;

# Actions

IUCN European, North and Central Asian members, commission members and experts attending the Regional Conservation Forum (14–16 December 2015 in Helsinki) call for the following actions:

- Account for the services that healthy ecosystems provide to society, as essential to achieving genuine economic, social and ecological sustainability and contributing to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda;
- Protect and restore ecosystems essential to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, food and water security, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation and mitigation to achieve resilient economic and social development;
- Provide science-based information, advice and guidance to decision makers for implementing nature-based solutions on key ecosystems, such as marine, forest, mountain, tropical, wetland and polar, as well as urban areas;
- Strengthen the knowledge base to secure our natural and cultural capital based upon biodiversity and ecosystem services;
- Develop and conduct economic analyses to make the case for nature-based solutions;
- Encourage the use of behavioral science as an instrument for transformational change;
- Encourage Parties of the CBD to achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets through rigorous review, updating and implementation of existing National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs);
- Uphold the principle of non-regression to prevent the weakening of biodiversity conservation legislation;
- Develop and use innovative financial mechanisms, such as the EU Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in European Territories (BEST) initiative to provide adequate funding for long-term and broader partnerships;
- Identify, reform and eliminate harmful subsidies to biodiversity, particularly in agriculture, fisheries and energy;
- Increase synergies between all the European Union funds and investments for fostering cooperation on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity;
- Promote IUCN Knowledge Products to demonstrate best practice management and assessment standards in support of the implementation and management of Europe's networks of protected areas, including World Heritage sites, protected areas in EU overseas, Natura 2000 and the Emerald Network;
- Advocate for indigenous peoples and community-based approaches to build conservation capacity, demonstrate progress and strengthen communication and awareness-raising especially among youth;
- Enhance understanding of the ecosystem services that biodiversity provides in cities and support IUCN's activities to inspire new generations;
- Enhance youth and gender-responsive approaches by empowering women and young people to participate in environmental decision-making and implementation of actions;
- Seek and provide adequate funding from all possible sources, including government departments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and the wider community, to realize achievements of the IUCN Programme 2017-2020;
- Ensure consistency and strengthen synergies between regional and international biodiversity-related conventions;
- Engage in stronger outreach to, and cooperation with, governments, subnational and local authorities to reflect their role in achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets;
- Support policy strengthening and sustainable use of natural resources in Europe, North and Central Asia;
- Urge cross-collaboration amongst Members, National Committees, Commissions and the Secretariat to further the implementation of this Message.



# Background context

## All ecosystems are the foundation for human well-being

Biodiversity loss continues at an unprecedented rate. The recently published State of the European Environment (EEA, 2015) and the mid-term review of the EU biodiversity strategy, among others, clearly show that more progress and actions have to be made to reach the goal of halting biodiversity loss by 2020. Special attention should be paid to EU Overseas that host more than 70% of the EU's biodiversity.

IUCN's European Red List findings have demonstrated that 25% of assessed European species are threatened with extinction and a total of 138 species are considered Critically Endangered in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. However this European Red List does not examine the EU Overseas. Additional efforts have to be done for a more comprehensive analysis.

Many National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans from Europe, North and Central Asia report species decline and habitat loss. This occurs particularly through unsustainable agricultural and fishery practices, and as a result of human population growth, the destruction of natural habitats, invasive alien species, unsustainable exploitation of natural resources and climate change.

The European region has rich, very diverse and fragile ecosystems from the Poles to the tropics, from the Mediterranean to the Baltic Sea, many of which are unique in the world. Europe, North and Central Asia are responsible for safeguarding these terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems, promoting ecologically sustainable resource management, restoring degraded areas and strengthening resilience. Many areas rich in biodiversity are threatened by current human activity and humanitarian crises.

## Implementing commitments to halt biodiversity loss and achieve sustainable development

Many European countries have some of the world's highest environmental standards. The effective implementation of existing policies and legislation, as well as enhanced cooperation through regional and international agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) with its Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, the Ramsar and Bern Conventions and the regional seas conventions are essential for reversing the alarming decline of biodiversity.

In the EU, the Birds and Habitats Directives are the cornerstones of nature policy and crucial for reaching the EU Biodiversity Strategy targets, by ensuring that Member States protect both species and habitats across the 28 EU countries under the Natura 2000 network. Where implemented appropriately, these directives have resulted in tangible conservation outcomes. However, special attention has to be paid to the fact that these directives are not applicable to all EU Overseas although they host more than 70% of EU biodiversity. It is important to make use of the mid-term review and the conclusions from Environment Council on 16 December 2015. These norms can support nature-based solutions which have an important role to play in responding to global, regional and national environmental challenges. IUCN has long been an advocate of these solutions which should be demonstrated, scaled up and used effectively in decision making.

Nature-based solutions are important for successful, cost-efficient and effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as in the mitigation and adaptation of climate change. IUCN has to continue to advocate for these solutions through conservation, restoration and ecosystem based adaptation.

Marine and coastal ecosystems are under pressure throughout Europe, and their status is of concern. The target of achieving good environmental status by 2020 is at risk due to overfishing, sea floor damage, pollution by nutrient enrichment and contaminants, introduction of invasive alien species, marine litter, climate change and the acidification of Europe's seas. Together with EU nature legislation and the Biodiversity Strategy to 2020, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) forms the basis of the EU's policy to achieve healthy, clean and productive seas by 2020. Compliance with designation of Marine Protected Areas is critical, and this can be supplemented by measures identified under the MSFD, especially in offshore areas. However, these key policies are not applicable to EU Overseas that provide to the EU the largest marine domain of the world anchored in every ocean: Pacific, Atlantic, Indian, Arctic and Antarctic.

In Europe, North and Central Asia, large-scale habitats, such as vast tracts of boreal and tropical forests overseas, polar ecosystems, Eurasian steppe and migratory corridors and coral reefs are affected by climate change and unsustainable management and require particular attention and a specific approach.

Reduction in the loss of natural and semi-natural habitats can be achieved through improvements in production efficiency and land/sea-use planning. Improving ecosystem connectivity and enhancing mechanisms for natural resource governance combined with recognition of the economic and social value of ecosystem services provided by natural habitats is important. Ecosystem restoration is the last resort that can help to reverse some of the losses of ecosystems services while contributing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



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# Background context

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The work undertaken by IUCN, the Global Invasive Species Program and IUCN's Invasive Species Specialist Group is essential to continue for increasing knowledge and implementation in this field. Trends in invasive alien species and the Red List Index for impacts of invasive alien species can be used for measuring trends on national, regional and global levels.

IUCN European members and experts have the responsibility to ensure that the effective implementation of biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of ecosystems is reached within European national boundaries. Collaboration outside of these boundaries should also be enhanced.

## Urgency to support mainstreaming biodiversity and to inspire new generations

Mainstreaming biodiversity into other policies and institutions to support ecologically sustainable development and a green-blue circular economy is essential to promoting and investing more in green-blue infrastructures. We have to fully embrace the biodiversity and environmental linkages in all Sustainable Development Goals and work towards integrated implementation, building on the Aichi Biodiversity Targets for formulating and using SDG indicators. Further, biodiversity and natural capital must be included in national accounting.

This includes the strengthening of civil society, in particular youth, local communities and indigenous peoples, and the need to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. Equitable, transparent and effective evidence-based decision-making systems are essential for both poverty reduction and the conservation, sustainable use of nature and resilience. IUCN should continue and enhance its work in EU Overseas and developing countries. It is essential that IUCN Knowledge Products are effectively used by decision makers to increase efforts to monitor the implementation of good governance principles in land/sea-use planning and policy development.

We need to move on from niche to norm and cooperate with the private sector. Business responsibility has to be broadened and environmentally sustainable on all business levels and we need to focus on bottom-up performance.

## IUCN's key role in providing trusted and credible knowledge

Through its broad membership structure and constituency, IUCN is in a unique position for developing knowledge, standards and tools, bringing together multiple stakeholders, empowering women, and bridging the gap between science and policy.

It is essential that IUCN Knowledge Products, such as the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, Key Biodiversity Areas, the IUCN Protected Area Management Categories, the IUCN Green List of Protected Areas and the IUCN Red List of Ecosystems be effectively used on a national scale. It is also important to contribute to the development of the Natural Resource Governance Framework and People in Nature. We need to increase the efforts to monitor the status and trends of species and habitats, to strengthen the integration of biodiversity issues into other sectors, and to build and improve the financing and capacity building for strengthening awareness of the benefits of nature and the scaling up of nature-based solutions.