

IUCN position paper for UNFCCC COP26

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP26)

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UNFCCC COP26 is taking place in the midst of a global pandemic, and escalating climate and biodiversity emergencies. The extreme weather events of 2021 – including catastrophic floods, heatwaves, and wildfires – remove any doubt that greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from human activity are destabilising established ways of life in developing and rich economies alike. Hardest hit by the impacts of the climate emergency are vulnerable communities around the world, although they have contributed the least to the problem.

As Parties to the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement convene in Glasgow, Scotland, IUCN would like to emphasise the following points, building on the key messages agreed on by IUCN's 1,500+ State, Government Agency, NGO and IPO Members in the [Marseille Manifesto](#) and various other [resolutions](#) at the [IUCN World Conservation Congress](#) in Marseille, France in September 2021:

- I. **The climate and biodiversity emergencies are upon us today. These are not two separate crises, but deeply interlinked manifestations of the same crisis. Countries must undertake urgent, sustained and deep reductions in global GHG emissions across all sectors, as called for by science, to limit global warming to 1.5°C. They must also promote greater alignment and synergies between international processes to address climate change and biodiversity loss.**
 - The findings of the recent IPCC Sixth Assessment Report from Working Group-I, [Climate Change 2021: the Physical Science Basis](#), underscore that unless there are immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in GHG emissions, limiting warming to close to 1.5°C or even 2°C will be beyond reach. The [2018 IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C](#) reminds us that limiting global average temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels requires global net anthropogenic CO₂ emissions to decline by about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching net zero around 2050.
 - The recent synthesis of all the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) submitted by countries under the Paris Agreement, published by the UNFCCC in September 2021, indicates an alarming gap between the current cumulative mitigation aims of Parties, and what science requires. Considering the available NDCs submitted by all 191 Parties to date, the [NDC Synthesis Report](#) estimates global GHG emissions to increase by about 16% in 2030 compared to 2010 levels. Unless immediate actions are taken, this increase could lead to a temperature rise of about 2.7°C by the end of the century, as per the latest IPCC findings.
 - IUCN's own assessments confirm the rapidly worsening impacts of climate change on the natural world, and hence the urgent imperative to reduce global GHG emissions. For instance, the [IUCN World Heritage Outlook 3](#) report, released in December 2020, identifies climate change as the biggest threat to natural World Heritage. It finds that 33% of the 252 natural World Heritage sites around the world – including the world's largest coral reef, the Great Barrier Reef – are currently threatened by climate change (this is up from 25% in 2017 and 14% in 2014).

For more information, please contact :

Stewart Maginnis
Deputy Director General
(Programme)
IUCN Headquarters
stewart.maginnis@iucn.org

Sandeep Sengupta
Global Coordinator, Climate
Change Portfolio
IUCN Headquarters
sandeep.sengupta@iucn.org

IUCN World Headquarters
Rue Mauverney 28
1196 Gland
Switzerland
Tel: +41 22 999 0000
Fax: +41 22 999 0002
mail@iucn.org
www.iucn.org

II. Nature-based Solutions¹ can make a critical contribution to both climate change mitigation and adaptation while also supporting biodiversity conservation, health, poverty eradication and other societal objectives agreed to under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In addition to undertaking deep GHG emission reductions across all sectors, IUCN urges all Parties to clearly recognise and support the enhanced implementation of Nature-based Solutions, including through formal decision text at COP26.

- Recent analysis published in *Nature* in 2021 shows that Nature-based Solutions – based on the protection, restoration and sustainable management of the world’s ecosystems – can have a powerful role in reducing temperatures in the long term. It estimates that Nature-based Solutions could save 10 gigatonnes of CO₂e per year, more than the emissions from the entire global transportation sector ([Girardin et al 2021](#)). Previous studies have estimated that Nature-based Solutions could contribute around 30% of the global mitigation required by 2030/2050 to achieve the 1.5/2°C temperature rise goal agreed to under the Paris Agreement ([Griscom et al 2017](#), [Roe et al 2019](#)).
- The adaptation benefits of investing in Nature-based Solutions are also amply clear. For instance, mangrove ecosystems alone are estimated to provide over US\$ 65 billion in flood protection benefits and safeguard 15 million people against flooding across the world every year ([Menéndez et al 2020](#)). More generally, it is estimated that the protection of coastal ecosystems can benefit upwards of 500 million people globally, bringing benefits of over \$100 billion per year ([Seddon et al 2021](#)). For inland ecosystems, afforestation/reforestation and improved and sustainable forest management are estimated to provide climate adaptation benefits for over 25 million people ([Smith et al 2019](#)).

- IUCN welcomes the growing recognition of Nature-based Solutions across the world today, including in the [2021 IPBES-IPCC Co-sponsored Workshop Report on Biodiversity and Climate Change](#) and the recent ministerial communiqués of the [G7](#) and [G20](#) released in May and July 2021 respectively. IUCN also welcomes the thematic prioritisation of Nature and Nature-based Solutions by the UK COP26 Presidency.
- Building on the above, and recalling the decision taken by Parties at UNFCCC COP25 that ‘*Underlines the essential contribution of nature to addressing climate change and its impacts and the need to address biodiversity loss and climate change in an integrated manner*’ ([Decision 1/CP.25, para 15](#)), IUCN urges all Parties in Glasgow to further operationalise this decision by clearly recognising and supporting the enhanced implementation of Nature-based Solutions in COP26 decision text, in line with the best international standards and guidance available.² For example, IUCN would propose the following language for the consideration of Parties for inclusion in Decision 1/CP.26 and Decision 1/CMA.3:

“The Conference of the Parties:

Invites Parties to actively recognise and support the enhanced implementation of Nature-based Solutions for climate change mitigation and adaptation, in line with the best international standards and guidance available.”

III. IUCN also urges Parties to further enhance the ambition of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and Long-Term Low GHG Emission Development Strategies (LT-LEDS) under the Paris Agreement, including by incorporating more ambitious and concrete Nature-based Solutions within them.

- A [joint IUCN and Oxford University study](#) published in 2019 found that although 66%

¹ IUCN defines Nature-based Solutions as ‘actions to protect, sustainably manage and restore natural or modified ecosystems, that address societal challenges (e.g. climate change, food and water security or natural disasters) effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits’. This is the definition formally adopted by IUCN’s 1,400+ State and NGO Members at the *2016 IUCN World Conservation Congress* in Hawaii, USA through [Resolution 69](#), and represents the most widely accepted global definition.

²The [IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™](#), launched in 2020, includes 8 specific criteria and 28 indicators intended to enable the coherent design, execution and evaluation of Nature-based Solutions. See also <https://nbsguidelines.info/> and <https://www.togetherwithnature.com/> for the four operational caveats that need to be followed for the implementation of Nature-based Solutions to climate change.

of Paris Agreement signatories included Nature-based Solutions in their NDCs, these were not substantive or stringent enough. A subsequent [WWF study](#) published in 2021 indicates a positive trend with a majority of the 55 enhanced NDCs submitted until May 2021 clearly referencing Nature-based Solutions in their mitigation or adaptation measures.

- However, considerable potential remains for Parties to further strengthen the role of Nature-based Solutions within their future NDCs, NAPs and LT-LEDS. Specific recommendations made in the IUCN-Oxford University study for the consideration of policymakers updating their NDCs are available [here](#).
- IUCN urges Parties to include ambitious, concrete and quantified targets on Nature-based Solutions in their future NDCs, NAPs and LT-LEDS, alongside enhanced targets on GHG emissions reductions across all sectors. IUCN also urges Parties to apply the [IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™](#) to guide the implementation of Nature-based Solutions on the ground.

IV. IUCN calls upon Parties to mobilise enhanced finance, including through innovative mechanisms, to enable the successful implementation of Nature-based Solutions at scale.

- Despite providing around 30% of the climate change mitigation required, it is estimated that only about 3% of climate financing is currently directed towards Nature-Based Solutions ([CPI 2020](#)). UNEP's [State of Finance for Nature 2021](#) report estimates that investments in Nature-based Solutions need to at least triple in real terms by 2030 and increase four-fold by 2050 if the world is to meet its climate change, biodiversity and land degradation targets.
- IUCN welcomes the recent focus given to the financing of Nature-based Solutions by the UNFCCC's Standing Committee on Finance (SCF), including at the [SCF Forum](#) in October 2021.
- In the context of the collective goal of mobilising US\$ 100 billion per year by 2020 for climate action in developing countries, IUCN urges Parties to allocate an increasing share of these funds to support the implementation of Nature-based Solutions

on account of their multiple benefits for both climate change mitigation and adaptation, and in line with the priorities and needs identified by recipient countries.

- In the context of Covid-19 fiscal stimulus packages and longer-term economic recovery programmes, IUCN calls for at least 10% of the total global recovery investments to be directed towards protecting and restoring nature, and for the remainder to do no additional harm.

V. IUCN underscores the importance of ensuring environmental integrity and adequate environmental and social safeguards while finalising the rules, modalities, procedures and guidance for operationalising Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, including those that may govern the future use of Nature-based Solutions in achieving mitigation outcomes under this Article.

- IUCN calls upon Parties to maintain the highest levels of environmental integrity and environmental and social safeguards while finalising the rules to operationalise Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. These should prevent any double counting of emission reduction or removal efforts – including through the application of robust accounting methods and accurate, transparent and verifiable corresponding adjustments – in order to achieve the most ambitious overall mitigation in global emissions.
- IUCN also calls on Parties to ensure that adequate safeguards are in place to prevent any adverse environmental or social consequences of the application of the mechanisms, rules and procedures developed under Article 6, especially on existing natural ecosystems and biodiversity and on local communities and Indigenous Peoples.
- In the event that Nature-based Solutions are used by Parties or other authorised public and private entities to deliver mitigation outcomes under Article 6, IUCN calls for these to adhere strictly to the [IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™](#), and other related safeguards, guidance and best-practice available, including those already agreed to by Parties.
- IUCN also emphasises that Nature-Based Solutions are not a substitute for ambitious

GHG emission reductions and must not be used to delay the urgent action required today to phase out fossil fuels and decarbonize the world economy.

VI. IUCN welcomes the progress being made for the preparation of the first Global Stocktake under Article 14 of the Paris Agreement and calls for a systematic consideration of Nature-based Solutions under this process.

- Noting that the Global Stocktake is crucial for enhancing the collective ambition of action and support towards achieving the purpose and long-term goals of the Paris Agreement, IUCN welcomes the opportunity provided to non-Party stakeholders to engage and contribute to this process.
- In particular, IUCN urges Parties to ensure that the Global Stocktake process systematically considers and assesses: (i) the contribution that Nature-based Solutions make towards climate change mitigation and adaptation; (ii) the extent to which Nature-based Solutions are being incorporated by Parties under their NDCs, NAPs and LT-LEDS; and (iii) the means of implementation and support available for Nature-based Solutions.
- The Global Stocktake also offers an important avenue to assess progress on issues such as Ocean and Climate Change linkages that are not yet being fully considered, and for which IUCN and its partners have produced [additional guidance](#).

VII. IUCN welcomes the progress made to date in operationalising the UNFCCC's Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples (LCIP) Platform and stresses the need to agree upon a new three-year work plan at COP26.

- Indigenous Peoples and local communities are at the forefront of climate change, often facing its worst impacts. They also play a critical role as stewards and guardians of the world's ecosystems and in delivering practical and effective Nature-based Solutions to climate change on the ground. As the Paris Agreement explicitly recognises the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the context of climate action, the establishment of the UNFCCC Local

Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) has been critical to moving that agenda forward.

- IUCN recognizes the progress made on the UNFCCC LCIPP and acknowledges the efforts made by its Facilitative Working Group, especially during Covid-19, to fulfil its obligations under the initial three-year work plan.
- At COP26, IUCN welcomes inclusive participation through the LCIPP and stresses the need to agree upon a new three-year work plan (2022-2024) to ensure the full and inclusive participation of all relevant actors and regions, including knowledge holders, youth, women, Indigenous Peoples and local communities in climate change policy and action. The LCIPP work plan should reinforce the need for an effective programme and funding to build the capacities of its stakeholders at multiple levels so that they can fully participate in climate-related activities.

VIII. IUCN reaffirms its commitment to the Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) and its Gender Action Plan (GAP), noting their role as critical enablers of gender-responsive climate policy and action, including for continuous learning and enhancing rights-based gender-responsive approaches to climate change.

- IUCN welcomes the progress made to date in substantively integrating gender considerations in various UNFCCC processes through the work of constituted bodies and in Parties' revised NDCs, and calls on all Parties and actors to continue to identify and support ambitious means for gender-responsive climate policy implementation.
- IUCN welcomes Parties' discussions and guidance for the LWPG and GAP mid-term review, recalling that it is critical to ensure the further strengthening and continuance of these efforts in order to deliver successful gender-responsive climate policy and action in support of the Paris Agreement implementation, both internationally and at the national level in 2022 and beyond.