

To: The Members of Parliament of the standing committee for Foreign Affairs
CC: Ben Knapen, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs
CC: Rein Willems, Chairman of the Platform Biodiversity and Business
Subject: The importance of ecosystems in official development assistance

IUCN Nederlands Comité
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Amsterdam, 25 May 2011

Dear Members of the Committee,

In the new policy for official development assistance, State Secretary Ben Knapen chooses to abandon the direct commitment to management and conservation of forests and other ecosystems. IUCN NL does not regard this as a wise decision. Especially in this area lies a fantastic opportunity and challenge for international cooperation and Dutch businesses. Also in the new partner countries for development assistance, many people depend directly on properly functioning ecosystems with a rich biodiversity in order to meet their daily necessities. For them, for the sustainable economic growth in these countries and for the Dutch economy it is of primary importance that the ecosystems there remain intact.

Scientists have been warning for years that the world economy is facing the planetary boundaries. Due to the increasing scarcity of resources, a large part of businesses realizes that the Netherlands should be moving towards a biobased economy. This awareness is also present in the top sectors which are indicated by the government. The Platform Biodiversity and Business, under leadership of Rein Willems, which was recently founded by the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers [VNO-NCW], SMEs Netherlands [MKB-Nederland], the Dutch Federation of Agricultural and Horticultural Organization [LTO] and IUCN NL, is responsive to these developments. Vital ecosystems guarantee sustainable resources such as wood, fibers and food, the supply of pharmaceutical and biochemical components, they counteract erosion and provide plague control. Ecosystems also stimulate the local economy due to tourism.

As answer to the written Parliamentary questions, State Secretary Knapen writes that the ecosystems play an important role because they supply products and regulate the climate, the supply of water and the fertility of the soil. For the State Secretary the environment is a cross-sectioning area of attention in development assistance. The State Secretary translates this into some pilot projects for sustainable management of natural resources for food guarantee and water management.

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IUCN NL cannot agree with the environment policy as cross-sectioning theme in some pilot projects. Our experience in our country and abroad is that this results in the loss of attention for ecosystems. The limited effort which is put into some pilots in practice proves to be insufficient for maintaining the ecosystems in a structural manner. In southern countries this will lead to the destruction of capital because projects cannot be stopped at once.

When the public funds for conservation and management of ecosystems stops, Dutch knowledge of this will also be lost. This is bad news for the innovative power of Dutch companies, but is also contrary to the necessary transition towards a biobased economy and the ambition to introduce sustainability into the top sectors. Especially as the natural resources are becoming increasingly scarce, we need this knowledge and experience in order to preserve and with this, guarantee the production of resources.

IUCN NL would like to ask the House of Representatives [Tweede Kamer] to make an effort to include the theme of ecosystems and biodiversity as a separate prime focus in the new policy for official development assistance.

We are willing to inform you further on this subject.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Ferwerda', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Willem Ferwerda
General Director