

## World Animal Net supports Food and Nature/Biodiversity as UNEA 4 Theme

The World Wildlife Fund's [Living Planet Index](#) shows global populations of fish, birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles have declined by 58 per cent between 1970 and 2012 and that by 2020 the planet could experience a two-thirds decline in vertebrates since 1970.<sup>i</sup>

Of the 85,000 species listed by the IUCN, more than 24,000 are in danger.<sup>ii</sup>

Research shows that four out of nine planetary boundaries, scientifically-based levels of human pressure on critical global processes that could create irreversible and abrupt change to the 'Earth System,' have been exceeded. These include extinction rate, deforestation, atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> and the flow of nitrogen and phosphorus.<sup>iii</sup>

However, humanity is intrinsically linked to the very systems we are destroying. Grazing, forestry, horticulture and crop systems rely on pastures, trees, pollination and other elements of terrestrial ecosystems. Healthy land and terrestrial ecosystems provide food and other resources for communities, and support social and recreational activities, as well as having cultural and spiritual significance.<sup>iv</sup> As UN Environment's own concept note on potential UNEA 4 themes states, "agriculture [is] also the main cause of deforestation in the tropics and currently consumes roughly 70% of all freshwater use globally leading to depletion of aquifers and salinization of soils in some locations. Food systems more generally are a leading source of biodiversity loss, and contribute 24% of greenhouse gas emissions, 33% of soil degradation, overfishing of 29 % commercial fish populations and over-exploitation of 20 % of the world's aquifers."<sup>v</sup>

Despite the ambitious goals set by the UN and affiliated bodies, we are not succeeding in stymying these losses. Instead, the trend is only increasing. This may be, in part, because the monumental contribution of food systems to biodiversity loss and degradation of nature are so often overlooked or dismissed as "necessary evils" in international policy circles. As stated in Phillips Lighting's recent blog on the UN Environment website, "It should be clear that we cannot continue to look at the challenges facing the world in isolation. It may be comforting to do so, as focusing on a single issue can provide for greater clarity and easier communication. But this approach has the danger of simply storing up trouble for future generations." It is time to thoroughly address the cross-cutting and interlinked issue of food and biodiversity, and UNEA 4 would be the ideal venue for this discussion to be held.

Urgent action is required to reform food systems in order to meet global commitments on climate change, biodiversity and support sustainable development. The UN Environment Assembly can and should lead concerted international action—garnering the support, motivation, and means of implementation necessary to end the biodiversity and extinction crisis by addressing the impact of food systems.

With this in mind, World Animal Net welcomes the opportunity to answer the call for submissions for the theme of the 4<sup>th</sup> United Nations Environment Assembly in support of the proposed topic Food and Biodiversity/Nature.

Further, we feel that this theme better suits UN Environment’s own criteria for theme selection than the alternative proposal. The intersection of food and biodiversity/nature is necessarily interdisciplinary, engaging economic and social needs and providing opportunity for progress at levels from the local to global. This theme also has the potential to illuminate actionable outcomes, with practical applications that will have real-world, substantial impact and ample possibilities for multi-stakeholder partnerships for implementation.

Further, food issues currently enjoy significant attention from the media, and thus this theme is highly marketable and resonant, whereas “sustainable consumption and production” is a bit less focused and “attention-grabbing.”

Finally, this theme cuts across the majority of SDGs (particularly 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 17) and has the potential to both follow up from various SDGs reviewed at the 2018 HLPF and feed into the theme and SDG review at the 2019 HLPF, while also engaging the broader UN family, from the Food and Agriculture organization, to the various environmental conventions, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and Convention on Migratory Species.

## **World Animal Net February 2018**

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<sup>i</sup> Living Planet Report 2016. Worldwide Fund for Nature. 2016.

[http://wwf.panda.org/about\\_our\\_earth/all\\_publications/lpr\\_2016/](http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/all_publications/lpr_2016/)

<sup>ii</sup> We Are Heading toward a World without Animals. New Statesman. 5 September, 2017.

<https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/nature/2017/09/we-are-heading-towards-world-without-animals>

<sup>iii</sup> Steffen, W., Richardson, K., Rockström, J., Cornell, S.E., Fetzer, I., Bennett, E.M., Biggs, R., Carpenter, S.R., de Vries, W., de Wit, C.A., Folke, C., Gerten, D., Heinke, J., Mace, G.M., Persson, L.M., Ramanathan, V., Reyers, B., & Sörlin, S. (2015). Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet. *Science* 347(6223). DOI:10.1126/science.1259 855.

<sup>iv</sup> Central Queensland. Sustainability Strategy 2030. <http://cqss2030.com.au/protect-assets/protect-terrestrial-ecosystems/>

<sup>v</sup> Selection criteria and possible themes for the Fourth Session of the UN Environment Assembly. 2018.