

What would you welcome as the most important elements and/or key messages from the ministers in the declaration to address the theme in an impactful manner?

Australia would welcome a Ministerial declaration that advocates for a global recovery from COVID-19 that improves both environmental and economic outcomes, as well as meaningful global action towards a Sustainable Ocean Economy, Nature-Based Solutions for climate change and ecological connectivity. We believe the global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic will present a significant opportunity to simultaneously improve environmental, economic and public health outcomes in the longer term. In this respect, Australia would welcome a Ministerial Declaration that reflects on the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, including its environmental dimensions, and demonstrates strong political will for effective global cooperation in the following areas:

1. **A Sustainable Ocean Economy:** The IPCC Special Report estimates that without action, climate-induced declines in ocean health will cost the global economy \$428 billion per year by 2050 and \$1.98 trillion per year by 2100. Australia believes the UNEA-5 Ministerial Declaration could guide opportunities to transition to a Sustainable Ocean Economy in support of the global economic recovery post COVID-19.

More broadly, we believe that the transition to a Sustainable Ocean Economy is a key message that comes under the theme for UNEA-5 of *Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*. As such, we would welcome a Ministerial Declaration that calls for actions towards the development of a Sustainable Ocean Economy on a global scale consistent with the UNEA-5 theme particularly concerning means of implementation for Nature-Based Solutions; the sustainable management, use and conservation of natural resources; and facilitating the implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Elements of a Sustainable Ocean Economy that could be covered in the Ministerial Declaration include:

- Addressing threats to ocean health through sustainable ocean management and reducing ocean pollution, particularly from waste plastics.
 - Emphasising that a healthy ocean underpins a sustainable ocean economy and supports marine industries.
 - Ensuring that management is informed by science and provides equal opportunity for engagement.
2. Australia has a strong interest in a Ministerial Declaration that calls for enhanced collaboration and global action on **Nature-Based solutions for protecting natural ecosystems and responding to climate change**. We believe the Declaration is an opportunity to highlight how the protection, restoration and sustainable management of nature supports climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience building and the protection of biodiversity. The Declaration should also emphasise the role played by Nature-Based Solutions in facilitating livelihoods, food security, sustainable/regenerative agriculture and economic development. Australia is driving action for Nature-Based Solutions through a number of initiatives, including the International Partnership for Blue Carbon, the Asia-Pacific Rainforest Partnership and the Global Forest Observations Initiative. As such, we support a Declaration that focusses on strengthening Action for Nature-Based Solutions in a several priority areas, including:

- Reforestation
- Forest protection
- Agricultural croplands
- Agriculture livestock
- Coastal wetlands and other blue carbon ecosystems such as seagrasses
- Peatlands

3. Finally, Australia would welcome a Ministerial Declaration that recognises the significance of **ecological connectivity for the survival of migratory species, as well as the broader environmental dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals**. Connectivity has been described as having four aspects¹, and goes hand-in-hand with Nature-Based Solutions; it fosters sustainable development by supporting the functioning of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, as well as recreational and cultural activities.

In this context, Australia would welcome a Ministerial Declaration that promotes ecological connectivity as a key conservation element for a broad range of environmental global agreements and initiatives, as well as national governments. Ideally, the Declaration would highlight the importance of ecological connectivity for safeguarding ecosystem functions and services, and protecting species by allowing animal movement, facilitating adaptation to environmental change, reducing human-wildlife conflicts and addressing threats created by barriers.

How can the Environment Assembly make a significant contribution to Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals at a global scale?

As the governing body of the cross-cutting United Nations Environment Programme and the world's foremost forum on the environment, Australia believes that the Environment Assembly is well placed to facilitate global action to protect, restore and sustainably manage the environment. This in turn can drive meaningful progress for climate change mitigation, adaptation, resilience building and the protection of biodiversity, while enabling livelihoods, food security and economic development.

We believe the Environment Assembly can highlight the opportunity to harness change and progress sustainable development as the global economy recovers from COVID-19. In particular, UNEA-5 should promote a re-doubling of international efforts to ensure sustainable production and consumption patterns and achieve the environmental sound management of chemicals and all wastes. The Assembly could be used to build support for international action to eliminate hard to recycle materials from packaging.

Wherever possible, the Environment Assembly should use its unique position to encourage coherence and complementarity among global environmental forums and initiatives. In particular, UNEA-5 could provide much-needed high-level and global support to help bring cohesion to the ocean agenda:

- It could complement and elevate the recommendations of the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, which are expected to be publicly released in late 2020 or

¹ Landscape connectivity as physical connection of natural vegetation; ecological connectivity as connectedness of ecological processes across multiple scales; habitat connectivity as connectedness between areas of suitable habitats for species; and evolutionary process connectivity, including the exchange of genetic material between populations.

early 2021. The Panel is a group of world leaders from 14 ocean nations, including Prime Minister Morrison, committed to catalysing solutions for long-term sustainability of ocean ecosystems and resources. The Panel's objective is to increase international understanding of how transition to a Sustainable Ocean Economy is critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals related to hunger, health, jobs, energy, sustainable communities and global partnerships, as well as the opportunities that a Sustainable Ocean Economy presents in supporting economic recovery post COVID-19.

- Reference to a Sustainable Ocean Economy as a key area for discussion would also allow UNEA to build on the outcomes of the IUCN World Conservation Congress and the post-2020 biodiversity framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

With respect to Nature-Based Solutions, the Environment Assembly can look to facilitate actions and linkages for joint work across actors, sectors and thematic areas, such as:

- Joint commitments to share expertise and assistance to support countries with large natural systems set up nature protection mechanisms (policies, regulations, management plans).
- Reviews of food and fibre production, and resource harvesting from critical natural systems and identification of new economically viable and sustainable solutions.
- Encouraging private sector investment in nature by developing a credible standard that signifies for nature protection.

The Environment Assembly can also serve a valuable function in raising the profile of key international environmental issues that would benefit from widespread public awareness. For instance, the global community will be negotiating the goals and targets that will underpin global efforts on biodiversity conservation over the next year or so. Ambitious new goals and targets are necessary to ensure we build on our previous efforts. Influential international bodies like the Environment Assembly provide an important global platform from which to highlight to the world the importance of urgent and ambitious action on biodiversity decline.

Similarly, we note that education regarding the importance of nature and the services it provides is a key component in the Sustainable Development Goals. Ensuring that learning about environmental issues and ecosystem services is included in curriculums will be vital to achieving longer term awareness, and ultimately achievement, of the Sustainable Development Goals. As such, we believe the Environment Assembly can make a valuable contribution to the longer term strengthening of actions for Nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals through effective global outreach and partnerships with educational institutions.