

**Consultation on UNEA 5  
President of the UN Environment Assembly and Minister of Climate and  
Environment of Norway**

World Animal Net (WAN) welcomes this opportunity to provide comments on the content of the Ministerial Declaration, and how to ensure that UNEA 5 is impactful. We provide the following suggestions for your consideration, and look forward to continued engagement and participation in the process.

- What would you welcome as the **most important elements and/or key messages** from the ministers in the **UNEA Ministerial Declaration to address the theme** [*Strengthening actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*] in an impactful manner?

In the wake of Covid-19, our hope is that the Ministerial Declaration will be a clarion call for a reassessment of the ways in which humans have been living – to the detriment of nature and animals, and ultimately human society, economies and livelihoods.

The Ministerial Declaration should outline the genesis of Covid-19, and stress the danger of similar, even more dangerous, pandemics in the future, if we do not urgently address humanity's fundamental dependency on nature. This was recognised in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and since reinforced in numerous scientific assessments.

Also, the Declaration should make the point that the adverse consequences of climate change and biodiversity loss will likely be much more severe, even existential, and that work on these should not be delayed.

There should be mention of the UN's [Harmony with Nature](#) programme, through which the UN has already recognised that humans and the natural world are interconnected within the larger web of life. Now there needs to be strong confirmation of this interconnectedness, and a pledge to take concerted action to move away from silo thinking, into systemic and holistic actions.

This should be followed by a call for the UN system and member states to place the environmental dimension firmly at the centre of sustainable development, along with the social and economic pillars. Now is the time for governments to commit their support to actions for nature, in order to achieve the sustainable development goals – and not just end of pipe “sticking plaster” actions, but meaningful actions addressing root causes. There can no longer be any shadow of doubt that policy and financial investment in environmental protection will pay dividends – not just in terms of nature, but also in the other two pillars, and indeed work to prevent future economic, social and health disasters.

In this regard, we place on record our plea that the wording of the Ministerial Declaration will move away from utilitarian language which places the environment as subservient to the economy. The intrinsic value of nature should be recognised. It should not be viewed as an economic resource, as this detracts from the importance of the environmental pillar of sustainable development – and will ensure that it is always viewed as a poor third consideration after the economic and social pillars. Money was only ever meant to be a “means to an end”, and not the primary goal of development. After all, true development is qualitative, not quantitative.

The coronavirus has handed us a great opportunity to move towards a more ecological and ethical civilisation ensuring well-being for humans, animals and nature, and a new spiritual or ethical reconnection with the earth. This means searching for alternatives to our current unsustainable and inequitable model of ‘development’.

This has to be done, because as Stephen Hawking said: “There is no planet B”.

We would expect member states to make a strong commitment to taking the urgent, transformative change needed, including addressing the direct and indirect drivers of the existential problems facing us today, including: biodiversity loss; animal extinctions, misuse and exploitation; climate change and pollution.

There should be support expressed for One Health/One Welfare concepts, which use science and practical experiences as a base, and support coordinated action across many government ministries, including environmental, agricultural and human health ministries. One Welfare is a broader, umbrella approach which encompasses One Health. This [website](#) explains the many links between human welfare and environmental well-being.

There should also be a commitment to policy change designed to achieve changes in human lifestyles and, in particular, transformative changes in human consumption and production within their societies.

We hope that member states will commit to implement existing environmental agreements for nature, and to providing full information and feedback on their implementation.

There should also be a commitment to the negotiation of firm protections for nature in relevant future negotiations – such as the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework, UNFCCC, the World Food Summit and other Multilateral Environmental Agreements.

We would also hope that the Ministerial Declaration will provide strong commitments to action on key UNEA themes/issues – including (but not only) those already agreed, such as the Aichi targets.

We would expect to see recognition that one of the major issues which needs addressing by urgent action and transformative pathways is our broken food and agriculture system, which has been captured by big business for profit, at the expense of natural resources, biodiversity, livelihoods, health and local food security. Policies, incentives and support should:

- move away from industrial agricultural models, towards regenerative agriculture, which is humane and sustainable.
- replace export models with local production and consumption, including community and school vegetable gardens.
- transition towards diets which are healthier, more productive, environmentally-friendly and predominantly plant-based foods.
- eliminate food waste as a priority, since around a third of food is currently wasted, and this simply adds pressure on the environment, food security, and animals - for no productive benefit.

We hope to see a strong statement on transformational change to food systems, which could be carried forward to the Food Summit.

Also, as regards wildlife, a reassessment of the use of wildlife in post-Covid times is needed – ensuring that the interests of nature, animals (including animal societies and culture (as is being explored by a working group within the Convention on Migratory Species), sentience and prey-predator relationships) and human health and well-being are taken into full account.

- How can the Environment **Assembly** make a significant contribution to *Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals* at a global scale? In doing so, you may take into account the **preparation for the meeting, its conduct and follow-up**, as well as its **relationship to other meetings and processes**.

The Environment Assembly should be firmly positioned in the current political context in order to be impactful. It should drill down into the (nature-based) root causes of the Covid-19 pandemic and other diseases/pandemics, and structure its proceedings in order to ensure that actions for nature are developed to not only prevent future recurrences, but also to “build back better”. It should aim towards a nature-based/green recovery.

However, the Environment Assembly should also be firmly based on the understanding that other human-driven crises, such as climate change and biodiversity loss and animal extinctions, have the potential to be much more far-reaching and existential. There should also be full recognition of the interconnectedness of these various crises, and the need to tackle them systemically and holistically when designing actions for nature.

This will be a challenge when designing the agenda – because on the one hand, a small number of pillars or action areas has been called for, and on the other hand, interconnections are clearly needed.

However, as we stated in our previous comments on the UNEP paper on the preparations for the Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA5) provided for the 150th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, we support the four Action Areas chosen in broad terms - although we would like to see less utilitarian wording used, along the lines suggested:

\*Action Area 1: Nature ~~for~~ and ~~Jobs and Economic Prosperity~~

\*Action Area 2: Nature ~~for~~ and Health

\*Action Area 3: Nature ~~for~~ and Climate

\*Action Area 4: Nature ~~for~~ and Sustainable Food Systems

For Action Area 1, would like to see the broader definition of “prosperity” used, rather than focussing on economic criteria alone i.e. flourishing/thriving, and encompassing broader aspects of well-being for nature, humans and animals.

In our view, these Action Areas would enable the proceedings to cover the most important issues underlying not only Covid-19/other pandemics, but also climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and resource use.

We do not think these Action Areas would overstep UNEA competences. Now, more than ever, we need to move away from silo thinking, and to reframe problems, both through an environmental lens (previously much-neglected), and at the same time looking at interrelationships. Indeed, this is the only way to achieve the systemic, transformational change which all the major UN flagship reports state is necessary – not only to achieve the SDGs, but also for our future survival.

A process could be developed whereby each of these Action Areas was considered separately, and then multi-disciplinary teams created to analyse their inter-relationships.

This “nexus” approach is particularly valuable as the Environment Assembly will take place in the run up to a series of global meetings on associated issues - including biodiversity, food systems, and climate – enabling clear messages to be developed which can be carried forward, including analysis of the inter-relationships between issues.

The preparation process for UNEA 5 will need to be carefully considered, given that most (if not all) of it is likely to be virtual. This may even be helpful in leading to greater use of research and analysis, and informed commentary, if well designed systems and processes are used. Efforts will also need to be made to ensure full stakeholder consultation and meaningful consultation. Online meetings are becoming more effective, but these need to be supported by accessible website portals, where all background research, UNEA documentation and comments are collated and made readily accessible.

Web meetings must permit access to all member states and stakeholders, and not be bound by maximum numbers of participants (as happened in a recent CPR meeting, when UNEP staff and many stakeholders were asked to leave the meeting to allow members states access).

Further, perhaps some of the time-consuming procedures associated with in-person meetings can now be reconsidered and replaced – for example, endless protocols and set-piece political statements can be replaced by meaningful engagement, backed up by specialist working groups and tailored science-based evidence.