



## **Contribution to the preparation of the ministerial declaration for the fifth United Nations Environment Assembly on “Strengthening actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”**

Further to the letter from Minister Sveinung Rotevatn, Minister of Climate and Environment for Norway and President of the UN Environment Assembly, of 24 April 2020, it is our pleasure to share a contribution from World Animal Protection for consideration in drafting a first outline of the UNEA 5 ministerial declaration. As requested, our contribution will specifically address the two questions posed.

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

The *common element* linking i) the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic; ii) the two major drivers of biodiversity loss; and iii) a key driver of the declining carbon sequestering capacity of earth’s main carbon sinks, *is the exploitation and abuse of animals*. Animals are a critical, yet ill-considered, part of nature’s ecosystem. The fact that animals are sentient, like humans, means that animals are distinct in their reaction to anthropological pressures from other elements of our ecosystems and warrant distinct attention in planning for and achieving true sustainability. Therefore, considering animal sentience in all policy processes and actively protecting animals and their welfare are critically important actions that need to be taken to strengthen nature and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**COVID-19:** There is currently near unanimous scientific certainty<sup>1</sup> that the COVID-19 coronavirus was transmitted from wildlife to humans. Equally, there is strong evidence that the initial transmission has been linked to the *sale of wild animals* for human consumption in a wildlife market in China<sup>2</sup>. The risk of transfer of infectious diseases in such a market, already high due to significant stress compromising the animals’ immune systems and because of the number of species being maintained in close proximity to each other, is further increased by often unhygienic conditions.<sup>3</sup>

**Biodiversity loss:** The most recent global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services<sup>4</sup> has determined that “for terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems, land use change has had the largest

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<sup>1</sup> According to the World Health Organization (WHO) “all available evidence for COVID-19 suggests that SARS-CoV-2 has a zoonotic source, [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200423-sitrep-94-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=b8304bf0\\_4](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200423-sitrep-94-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=b8304bf0_4)

<sup>2</sup> Bonilla-Aldana DK, Dhama K, Rodriguez-Morales AJ. Revisiting the One Health Approach in the Context of COVID-19: A Look into the Ecology of this Emerging Disease. *Adv Anim Vet Sci.* 2020;8{3}:234-237

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Wildlife-Markets-and-COVID-19-White-Paper-FINAL-6-Apr-2020.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> IPBES (2019). The global assessment report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services - [https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/ipbes\\_global\\_assessment\\_report\\_summary\\_for\\_policymakers\\_en.pdf](https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/ipbes_global_assessment_report_summary_for_policymakers_en.pdf)



relative negative impact on nature since 1970, followed by the direct exploitation, in particular *overexploitation, of animals*, plants and other organisms. Agricultural expansion, particularly to sustain *industrial livestock* systems,<sup>5</sup> is the most widespread driver of land-use change.”

**Climate change:** The two largest carbon sinks on the planet, namely the ocean and the tropical forests, both depend in large part on the *free movement of animals* to maintain their capacity to sequester carbon. Oceans and terrestrial ecosystems sequester approximately 5.6 gigatons of carbon per year. This is the equivalent of 60 percent of global anthropogenic emissions.<sup>6</sup> Many large tropical trees with a sizable contribution to carbon stock (for instance, 50 percent of all trees in the Amazon forest) rely on large vertebrate animals for seed dispersal and regeneration.

A recent study has found that defaunation (i.e. the reduction of large vertebrate animals as a result of hunting, illegal trade and habitat loss) has the potential to significantly erode carbon storage.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, marine animals are responsible for much of the carbon sequestration in the ocean. According to UNEP, a new concept, “*fish carbon*”, recognizes the potential of marine life to address the climate change challenge and prevent global biodiversity loss.<sup>8</sup>

While the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development may be people-centred, the Agenda recognizes that the welfare of people depends entirely on the welfare of the ecosystems in which we live **and**, increasingly, that the welfare of these ecosystems depends on our collective ability to protect them. Animals are a critical part of our global ecosystem.

Understanding how all animals, humans and broader ecosystems are connected and how they interact will determine whether we will achieve sustainable development. In nature, each action causes a reaction and, as animal welfare science expands, we become increasingly aware of the complex nature of the reaction to human action involving animals. Because animals, just like humans, are sentient, their reaction to human action, at a physical, physiological and psychological level, is fundamentally different than that of other elements of our eco-systems. Therefore, making certain that, at all times, animal sentience is considered, and animal welfare is respected, is a sensible and critical policy prescription for strengthening nature and ensuring future sustainable development.

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<sup>5</sup> Industrial livestock systems, which involve animal abuse as an integral element of the business model, are also a major driver of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), potentially an even more devastating human health threat than COVID-19. A 2016 review into the origins, impact and possible solutions for AMR has estimated that, if no action is taken, by 2050 drug-resistant infections will place at risk some 10 million human lives a year and a cumulative US\$100 trillion in economic output - O'Neill review on antimicrobial resistance (2016) - <https://amr-review.org/>

<sup>6</sup> IPBES (2019). The global assessment report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services - [https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/ipbes\\_global\\_assessment\\_report\\_summary\\_for\\_policymakers\\_en.pdf](https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/ipbes_global_assessment_report_summary_for_policymakers_en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Bello, Carolina & Galetti, Mauro & Pizo, Marco & Luiz, Fernando & Magnago, Luiz & Rocha, Mariana & Lima, Renato & Peres, Carlos & Ovaskainen, Otso & Jordano, Pedro. (2015). Defaunation affects carbon storage in tropical forests. *Science Advances*. 1. e1501105. 10.1126/sciadv.1501105 - <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/1/11/e1501105>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/business-unusual-how-fish-carbon-stabilizes-our-climate>



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.

Based on the above as well as an acknowledgement that animals are particularly relevant to human development and ecosystem sustainability (75 percent of food crops rely on animals for pollination<sup>9</sup>, 75 percent of infectious diseases are zoonotic<sup>10 11</sup>, 1 billion of the world's poorest people rely on animals as their primary productive asset<sup>12</sup>) we believe that the UN Environment Assembly can make a significant contribution to strengthening nature through the following actions:

- Recommend that the UN General Assembly adopt a Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare, including a determination that animals are sentient, adoption of the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) definition of animal welfare, and agreement on basic principles for considering and respecting animal welfare in all national policies that affect animals.
- Reintroduce the issue of wildlife trade onto the Environment Assembly agenda and call for a global ban on cross-border wildlife trade.

The issue of wildlife trade was on the agenda during UNEA 1 and UNEA 2 but was limited at that time to illegal wildlife trade only. However, armed with the knowledge that: i) the current COVID-19 has originated from legal wildlife trade; ii) the exploitation of wildlife is the second most impactful driver of biodiversity loss; and iii) the policy focus on endangered species is too restrictive to achieve positive change (the Convention on Biodiversity reports that a vast majority of countries are failing to demonstrate progress in the effort to preserve endangered species - Aichi target 12<sup>13</sup>), it is prudent to consider a ban on all cross-border wildlife trade as a first step towards protecting people's future health and ecosystem sustainability.

- Consider the introduction of a UNEA 5 resolution on the protection of animals and animal welfare to recognize the importance of animal welfare to:
  - human health (One Health, AMR, preventing future pandemics);
  - biodiversity (exploitation of wild animals being the second most impactful driver of biodiversity loss);

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<sup>9</sup> FAO (2016) - <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/384726/icode/>

<sup>10</sup> WHO (2013), Managing zoonotic public health at the human-animal-ecosystem interface

<sup>11</sup> Public Library of Sciences (2014), The Global One Health Paradigm: Challenges and Opportunities for Tackling Infectious Diseases at the Human, Animal, and Environment Interface at Low-Resource settings - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4230840/>

<sup>12</sup> World Bank (2009). *Minding the Stock: Bringing Public Policy to bear on Livestock Sector Development*

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.cbd.int/aichi-targets/target/12>



- o food security (36-40 percent of global human-edible crops are used as animal feed<sup>14</sup> in industrial livestock while losing at least 70 percent of calories in the process<sup>15</sup>);
- o poverty eradication (animal welfare key to sustainably increase productivity<sup>16</sup> of the primary productive asset available to the world's poorest people)
- o disaster risk reduction (the protection of livestock and working animals is included in the priorities for action of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction<sup>17</sup>); and
- o climate change (defaunation has the potential to significantly erode carbon storage<sup>18</sup>)

and to call for animal welfare to be considered and respected in all policy processes that affect or impact on animals.

World Animal Protection wishes to express its gratitude for being invited to contribute to the consideration of issues for inclusion in the UNEA 5 ministerial declaration and stands ready to provide further information, evidence and detail if so required. For ease of reference we will also attach a paper outlining how improving animal welfare provides a significant contribution to the achievement of the SDGs.

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<sup>14</sup> Cassidy et al (2013) Redefining agricultural yields: from tonnes to people nourished per hectare, University of Minnesota - <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/8/3/034015/meta>

<sup>15</sup> Nelleman et al (2009) The environmental food crisis – The environment's role in averting future food crisis, A UNEP rapid response assessment, United Nations Environment Programme - <https://www.unep-wcmc.org/resources-and-data/the-environmental-food-crisis-the-environments-role-in-averting-future-food-crises>

<sup>16</sup> Committee on World Food Security (2014) Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems - <http://www.fao.org/3/a-au866e.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291\\_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf](https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Bello, Carolina & Galetti, Mauro & Pizo, Marco & Luiz, Fernando & Magnago, Luiz & Rocha, Mariana & Lima, Renato & Peres, Carlos & Ovaskainen, Otsu & Jordano, Pedro. (2015). Defaunation affects carbon storage in tropical forests. Science Advances. 1. e1501105. 10.1126/sciadv.1501105 - <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/1/11/e1501105>