

WCC-2016-Res-043-EN
Securing the future for global peatlands

NOTING that peatlands occur in every continent of the world;

RECOGNISING that peatlands occupy 3% of the Earth's land surface area yet store more carbon than all the world's vegetation, including all forests, and that damaged peatlands release two gigatonnes of carbon to the atmosphere each year, equivalent to the carbon emissions of all air travel;

RECOGNISING that peatlands are among the most valuable ecosystems on Earth (also providing clean water and playing a key role in flood management), and support a wide range of rare, specialist and threatened biodiversity, and are valuable as a palaeontological archive;

RECOGNISING that peatlands are areas of geological interest on our planet and that they are of great scientific interest in recording climate evolution, the composition of the atmosphere, geological processes and agents, as well as biodiversity during the Quaternary Period;

WELCOMING the recognition by international environmental agreements and initiatives, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Ramsar Convention, of the importance of peatlands for climate change, biodiversity conservation, and a wide range of ecosystem services, and RECALLING that the restoration and sustainable use of peatlands has long been recognised as a priority under such activities but that implementation of these has been largely ineffective;

RECOGNISING that a workshop held during the IUCN World Conservation Congress at its session in Jeju, Republic of Korea (2012) called for IUCN to provide a focus for peatland action, for work with the business and private sector to secure funding, and for support to international efforts to share good practice and science relating to peatlands;

ACKNOWLEDGING the commitment to action for peatlands in the draft IUCN Programme 2017- 2020, the work of National Committees, such as the IUCN National Committee for the United Kingdom Peatland Programme, and the work of Members such as Wetlands International;

GRATEFUL that the IUCN National Committee for the United Kingdom has pioneered procedures to re-wet peat, to restore biodiversity, reduce emissions and sequester greenhouse gases;

TROUBLED that peat is being lost rapidly through peat forest fires, conversion of peatlands for agricultural uses, mining for fuel, mining to sell in horticulture, and to enable construction;

ALARMED at the potential for catastrophic loss of carbon, biodiversity and harm to water systems if action is not taken to halt the loss of peatlands and to restore damaged peatlands;

ALSO ALARMED that in Borneo and Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula peat forests are being increasingly drained, sometimes unlawfully burned, and converted to oil palm plantations, causing severe fires, harm to water systems, and catastrophic loss of carbon and biodiversity, and that this peat destruction has released such vast amounts of CO₂ that this region now contributes greenhouse gas emissions comparable to those of China or the USA, a sign it is time for action to be taken to halt the loss of peatlands and to restore damaged peatlands; and

CONCERNED that globally, there exists no legal provision for the stewardship of peat and peatlands, unless coincidentally peatland is located in a designated protected area or is subject to wetland preservation laws;

The World Conservation Congress, at its session in Hawai'i, United States of America, 1-10 September 2016:

1. RECOMMENDS that the Commission on Ecosystem Management should develop or endorse an existing scientific definition of peatland to be applied by the United Nations Food and

Agricultural Organization (FAO) in its Soils Charter, by the Ramsar Convention in its classification of wetland type, and by IUCN;

2. REQUESTS the World Commission on Environmental Law to prepare draft legislation for nations to use as a guideline recommending how to preserve and restore peatlands and how to include them alongside forests in all relevant intergovernmental agreements relating to climate change, geodiversity and biodiversity;
3. CALLS ON National Committees to cooperate with the Secretariat, Commissions and Members in developing or contributing to country-focused programmes to protect, restore and sustainably manage peatlands taking cognisance of the strategic actions of the FAO 'guidance for climate change mitigation by conservation, rehabilitation and sustainable use of peatlands' and the ongoing work of the Ramsar Convention particularly under Ramsar Resolution XII.11 on peatlands, climate change and wise use (2015);
4. URGES states to place a moratorium on peat exploitation until their legislation is strengthened to ensure peatlands are protected or managed through wise use principles; and
5. RECOMMENDS states to give appropriate consideration to the importance of the preservation of peatlands when implementing activities to reduce deforestation and forest degradation.

State and agency Members of the United States abstained during the vote on this motion for reasons given in the U.S. General Statement on the IUCN Motions Process.