

WCC-2016-Res-061-EN

Mitigating the impacts of oil palm expansion and operations on biodiversity

RECOGNISING that oil palm is the most productive commercially grown vegetable-oil crop in the world;

ALSO RECOGNISING the role of the industry in economic development;

AWARE that demand is expected to continue, and that both agro-industrial and small-holder oil palm development and expansion can have negative and costly impacts on the environment, including through deforestation, forest fragmentation, peatland degradation, water pollution, biodiversity loss, forest fires, and greenhouse gas emissions, and may also have negative impacts on community livelihoods causing a range of social issues;

AWARE of the work by some major industry actors and other initiatives with the stated intention of achieving a supply of palm oil that minimises such damaging effects;

CONCERNED that the rapid development of industrial-scale oil palm plantations often takes place in the absence of strategic and jurisdictional land-use planning and without appropriate consideration for the negative biodiversity and social impacts it causes, the latter sometimes involving human rights violations;

ALSO CONCERNED that oil palm is planted exclusively within the humid tropics, so any expansion or mismanagement of operations may involve loss or degradation of habitat for countless species of animals and plants, many of which are threatened;

RECALLING the international commitments that governments have made to stemming the loss of biodiversity through the adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020, including the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and

AWARE that many of the negative impacts associated with oil palm expansion are avoidable or could be mitigated through strategic land-use planning and licensing, legal reforms to secure the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, effective implementation of environmental regulations, appropriate plantation design, ecological restoration, commitment by the industry to the implementation of best practices, and support to the small-holder sector to improve its environmental performance;

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

1. REQUESTS the Director General, together with the Species Survival Commission (SSC), the Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM) and the Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP), to conduct a situation analysis of the implications for biodiversity conservation from the expansion of oil palm, and to review and define best practices in the industry;
2. CALLS ON the Director General and Commissions to establish an Oil Palm and Biodiversity Task Force, building upon existing studies focused on the impacts of palm oil expansion and operations on biodiversity, land-use planning and best practises, to:
 - a. support governments and other actors in regions where oil palm is expanding, to identify important intact forest areas and other critical ecosystems, such as peatlands, where oil palm development should be avoided and areas where oil palm could be grown using agreed best practices;
 - b. promote inclusive decision-making processes, with the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples, local communities and other stakeholders, and provide technical inputs to the development of realistic strategies within or outside current industry initiatives that stimulate appropriate land-use planning at the landscape, national and regional levels, while recognising environmental, regulatory and local rights issues;

- c. identify the conditions for sustainable and responsible palm oil production to help inform governments and others of best practices;
 - d. review the availability of existing oil palm concession maps and other spatial data, and provide recommendations to increase their accessibility and value for conservation purposes; and
 - e. assess the policies and incentives driving the expansion of palm oil, including for biodiesel and bioenergy, and provide recommendations on sustainable alternative sources; and
3. URGES Members, especially State and Government Agency Members, as well as the private sector, to:
- a. ensure that land-use planning for oil palm plantations is done to avoid areas of intact forest, Key Biodiversity Areas, High Carbon Stock forests, peatlands, World Heritage Sites and territories and areas of indigenous peoples and local communities in order to ensure maximum conservation of biodiversity, maintenance of ecological integrity, protection of livelihoods and avoidance of conflict;
 - b. reduce the negative impacts of oil palm plantations in existing production areas by requiring compliance with laws through effective control and sanction systems;
 - c. promote in-the-field compliance of companies with quality voluntary standards having robust criteria for palm oil and promote continuous improvement of these standards in line with the recommendations made by the Task Force under paragraph 2 c above;
 - d. create mechanisms that support small-holders to improve environmental performance, including access to certification systems; and
 - e. respect internationally recognised human rights, and implement applicable environmental and social standards and safeguards concerning indigenous peoples and local communities, including recognition of formal and informal land and resource rights and tenure and free, prior and informed consent, as provided for in the relevant standards and safeguards, and transparent and impartial dispute settlement mechanisms to address land-use conflicts and other concerns.