

WCC-2020-Res-136-EN

Protecting the Okavango from oil and gas exploitation

RECOGNISING that the Working Group 1 contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that human influence due primarily to fossil fuels has warmed the atmosphere, oceans and land and that many changes due to past and future greenhouse gas emissions are irreversible for centuries to millennia;

RECALLING that the International Energy Agency (IEA) has stated that “[N]o new oil and natural gas fields are needed in the net zero pathway [...]”;

RECOGNISING that the Okavango Delta is a UNESCO World Heritage site, the world’s largest Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention, and part of the five-nation Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA);

NOTING the ecosystem diversity of the Okavango region and the KAZA TFCA, which is home to many indigenous peoples and other local communities, as well as many endangered species of fauna and flora;

RECOGNISING that the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights guarantees the rights to a healthy environment and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC);

RECALLING Recommendation 6.102 *Protected areas and other areas important for biodiversity in relation to environmentally damaging industrial activities and infrastructure development* (Hawai’i, 2016) in which Members recognised protected areas as no-go zones for industrial activities, including oil and gas exploitation;

ACKNOWLEDGING the decisions of the World Heritage Committee (WHC) that environmentally damaging industrial activities and infrastructure developments are incompatible with World Heritage status and that states should avoid negative impacts on World Heritage sites from such activities outside their boundaries (e.g. Decisions 39 COM 7A.4 and 34 COM 7A.2); and

RECALLING Decision 44 COM 7B.80 of the World Heritage Committee: “[E]xpress concern about the granting of oil exploration licenses in environmentally sensitive areas within the Okavango river basin [...]” and “[U]rge ... States Parties ... to ensure that potential further steps to develop the oil project ... are subject to rigorous and critical prior review, including through Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that corresponds to international standards [...]”;

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2020, at its session in Marseille, France:

1. URGES all Member States to ensure that human rights and other international law obligations are a primary consideration in all policies and decisions regarding oil and gas exploration and development, and other extractive activities;
2. URGES all Member States to ensure that decisions regarding oil and gas exploration and development and other extractive activities respect the right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) and that consent processes include comprehensive consultation on the adverse impacts of climate change, the impacts of the proposed activities on the climate, and risks to water resources, flora and fauna, forests, food security, livelihoods and culture, *inter alia*; and
3. CALLS ON the governments of Botswana and Namibia to ensure, in line with Decision 44 COM 7B.80 of the World Heritage Committee, that strategic and comprehensive environmental impact assessments adhere to international standards, are subject to rigorous and critical prior review and are conducted prior to any further exploration and any future development of oil and gas resources and other extractive activities in and/or affecting the Okavango River basin and its people.