

## **Comments from World Animal Net (WAN)**

### **“Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” Note on the preparations for the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly**

World Animal Net welcomes the background document for agenda items 5 and 6 of the 150th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, presenting ideas for consideration on the preparations for the Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA5). We have considered this document, and submit the following comments and suggestions for your attention.

#### **General**

We agree with the premise that targeted actions for nature are key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and that such actions will play a significant role in the Post-Covid-19 economic re-start and recovery – on the proviso that such actions are systemic in nature. We believe that the UNEA 5 theme has even more relevance in these post-Covid times, but that this needs to be approached with a far greater sense of urgency and political will than has been demonstrated in practice thus far (although often given lip-service).

We consider that there is a need to go much farther than “making progress on our global roadmap for a more inclusive and sustainable future”. This sounds far too much like “business as usual”, and that has always meant nature taking a back-seat to economic and social considerations in the anthropocentric UN Headquarters system and High Level Political Forum. We actually need a complete reassessment of the way that humans have been living - to the detriment of nature and animals, and ultimately human society. In short, the time is overdue for a real paradigm change – as called for in [this article](#). We need to use the preparations for UNEA 5 to drill down on the transformative changes we need for our society to survive in the 21st century, and then to make positive plans to change the systemic threats to nature that we can change, and call on others in positions of power to change those that we cannot.

Humanity’s fundamental dependency on nature was recognised in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and has since been reinforced in numerous scientific assessments. Now Covid-19 has further reinforced this. UNEA 5 must bring this recognition to policy-makers, stakeholders and beyond, to citizens across the world, together with clarion calls for action.

#### **UNEP’s Medium-Term Strategy (MTS)**

UNEA 5 will be important for designing a firm and forward-looking medium-term strategy for UNEP. However, it is vital that this has as its ultimate aim a world that is “living in harmony with nature”, and not a world in which nature has been “put to work” for people and the economy...

Also, as suggested above, in order to effectively tackle the direct and indirect drivers of environmental degradation, climate change, extractive use of natural resources, biodiversity loss and animal extinctions, UNEA 5 will need to be bold enough to go beyond UNEP's own work plan, to call for broader and deeper systemic changes across the whole UN and development system. We can no longer support silo thinking, but need to work holistically for genuine systemic change.

#### **Four Suggested Action Areas**

We fully support the idea of having a manageable number of important pillars to the work of UNEA 5, each with a specific focus/thrust. This should prevent the usual diverse and meandering considerations, and multitude of small sectoral resolutions (at a time when we are aiming towards more holistic policy responses). Instead, it should support systemic research and analysis, leading to better informed policy direction and actions.

In broad terms, we support the four Action Areas chosen:

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

\*Action Area 2: Nature for Health

\*Action Area 3: Nature for Climate

\*Action Area 4: Nature for Sustainable Food Systems

However, the way in which these are phrased and presented is extremely utilitarian. The wording of the Action Areas – see above - presumes that nature is **for** jobs/economy, health, climate, food systems. Whereas we should rather be seeking a reassessment of interrelationships. The time when the relevance of the protection of nature and animals needed to be given an economic or social value has passed, especially in the wake of Covid-19. We should no longer be taking positions, or using terminologies, which relegate nature to a poor third place behind the social and economic pillars of sustainable development. We need a reassessment of interrelationships: moving the environment up the list of political priorities to be an integral part of holistic policy-making – full centre, along with economic and social considerations. This framing in no way reflects or guides society towards “living in harmony with nature”.

At the very least, it would be better if these Action Areas were reworded e.g. “Nature **and** Jobs/Economic Prosperity”. Also, replacing “**for**” with “**and**” in the three subsequent Action Areas.

However, we question the narrow definition of “prosperity”, focussing on economic criteria alone... Prosperity should be defined more widely – flourishing/thriving, and encompass broader well-being. So, perhaps the first Action Area should be:

\* Nature and Prosperity – Well-Being, Economy and Jobs/Livelihoods – or something similar?

The wording leading up to these suggested Action Areas is also utilitarian:

... “political commitments will be required to protect and conserve the ecosystem services that nature provides, targeting both the direct drivers of biodiversity loss”. Firstly, this should be about protecting and restoring nature – not just because of securing the

“ecosystem services” (we reject this terminology and its inference), but also for nature’s intrinsic value. Secondly, not just for biodiversity loss, but for all reasons environmental (climate change, environmental degradation, pollution etc. as well as biodiversity loss).

We will provide more detailed comment on what could be included in the suggested Action Areas, if these are agreed in broad terms. However, at present, our key thought is that to make a real difference, these would need to be considered with a view to systemic change (where current systems are broken), i.e. tackling root causes *however difficult*, rather than simply individual “actions” targeting end or pipe problems caused by the system.

This will take thorough analysis and deep introspection, facilitated by visionary leadership.

### **50th Anniversary of the Establishment of UNEP**

It will be an excellent opportunity to kick-off of the 50th anniversary of UNEP during UNEA 5. However, we feel that some of the items mentioned here should be fully considered within UNEA 5 and its preparatory processes, and not just left until the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In particular:

- Reflect on how to promote a more systematic approach to many of the environmental challenges that the world is facing today; and
- Enhance and strengthen the environment in the UN-system.

### **Process**

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.

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 replaced by meaningful engagement, backed up by specialist working groups and tailored science-based evidence?

Thank you for this opportunity to present our comments, and sending very best regards for the safety and well-being of all at this difficult time.

**World Animal Net**  
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