

## COP16 outcomes for tackling the joint biodiversity and climate crises

### **Biodiversity-climate overlap vital for carbon-dense ecosystems, primary forests: Greenpeace calls for joint work program between the UN Biodiversity and Climate Conventions**

*[High-carbon ecosystems](#) like forests, wetlands, peatlands, mangroves, and marshes are critical to both maintaining biodiversity and storing carbon. But protection and restoration of their integrity is currently insufficient. Further, climate actions that harm biodiversity are currently not addressed, while offsets for fossil fuel emissions or for biodiversity destruction are allowed.*

#### **Summary**

The [science](#) is clear: climate change and biodiversity loss can't be tackled separately. Global biodiversity loss and climate change are interconnected, and these crises need to be tackled in tandem, including the proper protection and restoration of the ecological integrity of carbon-dense ecosystems. Therefore, synergies between the biodiversity and climate conventions need to be maximised and negative trade offs need to be addressed.

Creating synergies between National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for climate action will accelerate the use of approaches that protect biodiversity and also deliver rapid climate mitigation and adaptation benefits for comparatively less cost. It's also critical to avoid impacts of negative climate actions on ecosystems and biodiversity. Maximising these synergies is also necessary for allocating adequate resources to protection of ecosystems like primary forests, wetlands, peatlands, mangroves, and marshes, which are critical to both biodiversity and climate, with full integration of rights-based approaches included the rights, roles, and territories of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities.

But for now the mandates of the UN Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are too often considered in isolation. The debate about synergies is more developed at the CBD than at the UNFCCC, and COP16 will need to set the tone for paying more attention to synergies at the UNFCCC at COP29 through two important decisions to be taken in Cali: (1) Cooperation with international organisations, and (2) Biodiversity and climate change, providing the time for it to evolve forward to COP30 in 2025, which the Brazil presidency has already slated as a climate-nature COP, echoing the views of the Colombian CBD COP16 presidency.

#### **Ecosystem integrity**

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) defines [ecosystem integrity](#) as: "The ability of an ecosystem to support and maintain ecological processes and a diverse community of organisms. It is measured as the degree to which a diverse community of native organisms is maintained, and is used as a proxy for ecological resilience, intended as the capacity of an ecosystem to adapt in the face of stressors, while maintaining the functions of interest."

Protecting and restoring ecosystem integrity is essential for the provision of all [ecosystem services](#), which the IPBES defines as "the benefits people obtain from ecosystems". Target 1 of the KM-GBF calls

for the retention of all areas with high ecological integrity. The CBD does not, however, clearly identify and discourage climate-response actions that harm ecosystem integrity or ecological integrity.

As Young, et al., have shown in a [policy discussion paper](#), published in 2023, ecosystem integrity is also central to high-carbon ecosystems' ability to store carbon. Ecosystems that have high ecological integrity are at lower risk of releasing carbon to the atmosphere than ecosystems degraded by modern industrial disturbance. Ecosystem integrity is central to a web of factors, where the ability of ecosystems to retain carbon over the long-term is in part dependent on retaining and improving their ecological integrity, which is in turn dependent on not only retaining and recovering their natural composition, patterns and structure of biodiversity, but also in part dependent on limiting global warming to within their system limits.

The UNFCCC's Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) accounting rules do not, however, recognise the importance of protecting and restoring carbon stocks in natural ecosystems. The importance of forest ecosystem integrity for reducing risk and improving longevity of carbon storage is not present, while state parties are even allowed to offset fossil fuel emissions through annual net forest sequestration.

This is a problematic interpretation of the global 'Net Zero' goal. Lack of recognition for what types of ecosystems (e.g., those with high ecological integrity) are effective in storing carbon, and under what conditions they are able to provide this carbon storage function, undervalues the importance of primary forests, wetlands, peatlands, mangroves, and marshes, among other high-carbon ecosystems in climate mitigation and adaptation.

#### **Current recognition of the central attribute of ecosystem integrity includes:**

- The [2021 IPBES/ IPCC workshop](#) concluded that the biodiversity and climate crises amplify each other, that neither crisis can be solved unless they are solved together and that synergistic climate and biodiversity action must be encouraged. The workshop also identified a cascading set of priorities for synergistic action: firstly improve protection and secondly restore carbon-dense and species-rich natural ecosystems.
- [IPCC AR6 WG III](#) concluded in 2022 that protection offers the highest mitigation value of any action in the agriculture, forests and other land uses (AFOLU) sector and that carbon lost from carbon dense ecosystems will be irrecoverable by 2050. [IPCC AR6 WG II](#) highlighted the importance of maintaining and improving ecosystem integrity for climate adaptation.
- COP 28 [Decision1/CMA 5](#) paragraph 33 emphasises “the importance of conserving, protecting and restoring nature and ecosystems towards the achievement of the Paris Agreement temperature goal, including through enhanced efforts towards halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation by 2030, and other terrestrial marine ecosystems acting as sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases and by conserving biodiversity, while ensuring social and environmental safeguards, in line with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. In its preamble, the decision notes the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including in forests, the ocean, mountains and the cryosphere, and the protection of biodiversity.
- KM-GBF [Target 1](#): “Ensure that all areas are under participatory, integrated, and biodiversity inclusive spatial planning and/or effective management processes addressing land and sea use change, to bring the loss of areas of high biodiversity importance, including ecosystems of high

ecological integrity, close to zero by 2030, while respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.”

## **Biodiversity-climate synergy**

There is clear [scientific evidence](#) that biodiversity loss and climate change are two sides of the same coin, and their solutions can often be found in the same places. “High carbon” terrestrial, coastal, and marine ecosystems such as peatlands, mangroves, wetlands, forests, and marshes are often the [same places](#) that are essential to maintaining biodiversity. Further, certain ecosystem types that are critical for biodiversity are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (e.g. coral reefs), and attributes of many ecosystems, such as their [integrity and connectivity](#), influence their global climate regulation services and/or their localised [resilience to climate impacts](#).

The reduction of risk to ecosystem carbon storage is relevant both for halting the emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere from damaged ecosystems and the support of climate-resilient development.

The scientific community has produced important [papers](#) emphasising the need to align climate and biodiversity action for increased results in climate mitigation, adaptation, and protection of biodiversity as ecosystem services.

However, current national biodiversity and climate policies fail to reflect: the full potential of biodiversity as a climate mitigation and adaptation solution, nor the impact of climate change and climate change response measures on biodiversity; and the interaction between biodiversity loss and risks from threats that are increasing with climate such as drought and fire and the likelihood of reaching ecosystem tipping points.

[Nature4Climate's policy tracker](#) shows that only 45% of climate policies show marginal alignment with nature commitments, with only 12% having dedicated budgets.

## **Critical next steps**

The COP16 decision under [agenda Item 13](#) on Cooperation is a critical opportunity for Parties to agree on the kinds of actions that they and the Executive Secretary will take to enable effective collaboration between the conventions. Discussion on the May 2024 Subsidiary Body for Implementation ([SBI recommendation](#)) for this decision showed strong consensus emerging. A recent May 2024 CBD recommendation for COP16 on cooperation with other conventions and international organisations is the most ambitious draft text on cooperation so far. It includes asks for a joint work program between the Rio Conventions, and close coordination and collaboration between both national focal points, stronger synergies in national plans under the 3 Rio conventions (the CBD, the UNFCCC, and the the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)) and a more important role for the Joint Liaison Group between the secretariats of the three conventions.

The decision under [Item 25](#) on Biodiversity and Climate Change is a crucial opportunity for a more detailed assessment of the connections between the climate and nature crisis and the type of synergistic action needed to ensure progress on both. Amongst a busy COP schedule, it is essential that this decision is prioritised and that a decision is reached ahead of UNFCCC COP29 which follows directly after CBD COP16.

The Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice ([SBSTTA recommendation](#)) of October 2023 should be strengthened to include ecosystem integrity and to extend the request for a joint work program beyond the scientific bodies of the IPBES and IPCC and call for a joint work program

between the Rio conventions. Hence, the coordination between the incoming, current and outgoing presidencies of the 3 conventions' COPs plays an important role in driving the process forward, following China's (COP15) and the UAE's (COP28) initiative for a joint statement on [climate, nature and people](#).

### **Calls for stronger climate and biodiversity synergies at the Conventions**

Calls for stronger climate and biodiversity synergies that have already appeared in decisions from UN COPs include:

- The UNFCCC COP28 [GST decision](#) refers to the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, to the importance of nature-based climate action to be in line with the KMGBF and to the Glasgow Declaration goal of halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation by 2030;
- The COP28 joint statement ([‘the Joint Statement’](#)) on climate, nature and people;
- The [recommendation](#) on the work programme of the IPBES adopted at CBD SBSTTA-26 in May this year includes a request for more scientific assessment work on biodiversity and climate change;
- Parties have already called for collaboration between the CBD and UNFCCC, including the establishment of an Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Biodiversity and Climate Change with both CBD and UNFCCC membership requested in CBD COP 9 Decision [IX/16](#). The Expert Group met in [2008](#) and [2009](#) and elaborated on the many opportunities to advance synergies between the CBD and UNFCCC that have yet to be realised due to lack of coordination between the Conventions.
- [KM-GBF Target 8](#) recognises the importance of synergistic action:”Minimise the impact of climate change and ocean acidification on biodiversity and increase its resilience through mitigation, adaptation, and disaster risk reduction actions, including through nature-based solution and/or ecosystem-based approaches, while minimising negative and fostering positive impacts of climate action on biodiversity.” The CBD has yet to identify and discourage climate actions that harm biodiversity.”
- [KM-GBF Target 11](#): “Restore, maintain and enhance nature’s contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services, such as regulation of air, water, and climate, soil health, pollination and reduction of disease risk, as well as protection from natural hazards and disasters, through nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches for the benefit of all people and nature. This target provides a bridge to the UNFCCC’s GGA and to defining necessary actions for nature-based climate adaptation including an integrated indicators framework. The UAE-Belém work programme is a first attempt to work on accountability w/r/t targets and objectives of both the Paris Agreement and the KM-GBF.”
- Other CBD COP decisions that have recognised that biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services have a critical role in climate change adaptation, mitigation and disaster risk reduction include [VII/15](#) of 20 February 2004, [IX/16](#) A to D of 30 May 2008, [X/33](#) of 29 October 2010, [XI/19](#), [XI/20 and XI/21 of 19 October 2012](#), [XII/20 of 17 October 2014](#), [XIII/4](#) of 13 December 2016, [14/5](#) of 29 November 2018, decision [14/30](#) of 30 November 2018 and [15/24](#) and [15/30](#) of 19 December 2022.
- UNFCCC COP decisions that recognize the importance of protecting, conserving, and restoring nature and ecosystems for achieving the Paris Agreement temperature goal, and for adaptation

include 1.CP/25 of 2018 (paragraph 15), the [Glasgow Climate Pact](#) of 2021 (paragraph 38) and the [Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan](#) of 2022 (paragraphs 15, 21, 47).

- The [Report of the Bern III Conference](#) on Cooperation among the biodiversity-related conventions for the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

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