



## THE WORLD PARKS CONGRESS 2014: INSPIRING SOLUTIONS FOR PARKS, PEOPLE AND PLANET

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### ABSTRACT

The largest-ever gathering of those involved with protected and conserved areas worldwide took place in Sydney, Australia in November 2014. The programme encompassed a broad scope of discussions under the headline of *Inspiring Solutions for Parks, People and Planet*. The event aimed to: (i) find better and fairer ways to conserve natural and cultural diversity, involving governments, businesses and citizens in establishing and managing parks; (ii) inspire people around the world and across generations to reconnect with nature; and (iii) demonstrate nature's solutions to our planet's challenges such as climate change, health, food and water security. More than 6,000 participants took part in a full spectrum of workshops, events, pavilions, world leaders' dialogues, e-posters and field visits and helped craft a new vision for the role of protected areas in the decade and generations to come. This challenge, the *Promise of Sydney*, was handed over to the IUCN President, Mr Zhang Xinsheng and adopted by acclamation at the Closing Plenary on 19 November 2014.

**Key words:** Protected areas, World Parks Congress, Promise of Sydney

### INSPIRING SOLUTIONS: THE PROMISE OF SYDNEY

The world's largest-ever gathering of those involved with protected and conserved areas worldwide took place in Sydney, Australia from 12 to 19 November 2014. As outlined in *PARKS* (Sandwith et al., 2014), the programme for the meeting encompassed a broad scope of discussions under the headline of *Inspiring Solutions for Parks, People and Planet*. The event aimed to: (i) find better and fairer ways to conserve natural and cultural diversity, involving governments, businesses and citizens in establishing and managing parks; (ii) inspire people around the world and across generations to reconnect with nature; and (iii) demonstrate nature's solutions to our planet's challenges such as climate change, health, food and water security. More than 6,000 participants took part in a full spectrum of workshops, events, pavilions, world leaders' dialogues, e-posters and field visits to take stock of progress since the last Congress in Durban, South Africa and to craft a new vision for the role of protected areas in the decade and generations to come.

In particular, the Sydney Congress spelled renewal by revising the world's perception of protected areas; they

are not only a critical and successful means to secure biodiversity on Earth, but also their unique diversity of governance and management across all components of society are instrumental in helping the world to achieve sustainability and societal aspirations. As in the past, the Congress provided evidence of the vitality of the global movement of those involved in protected areas and signalled both warnings and promising directions for the years ahead. Achim Steiner, UN Under Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, remarked in the Opening Plenary (Steiner, 2014), that the protected area community had come a long way since Durban and had adapted significantly in response to the challenges presented there. Regarding the Promise of Sydney, he made a call for us to 'commit to bold, transformative actions and effective implementation at site, national and international levels. Let us learn from the past, but also recognize that it is today's youth that will inherit our protected area legacy, and the responsibility for managing the protected areas of the future. They will also bear the cost of our decisions today. Such decisions must ensure that the protected areas of the future will not be fenced off last frontiers that ward off humans to keep in what is left of our natural heritage. But rather that the



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Parks of the future will be a place where multiple values interact: ecological, biological, cultural, societal, economic and aesthetic – brought together by sound management and sustainable financing, as a basis for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. Now this is a promise worth keeping.’

The Congress was designed to launch a step-change in protected and conserved areas implementation by highlighting the most innovative approaches to addressing challenges and opportunities, and to forge new directions that would give lasting impetus to the work ahead. A few highlights of the Congress and its outcomes are:

- The welcome to country and the commitments of the host country Australia to address challenging conservation objectives in tropical rainforests, the Great Barrier Reef and the Coral Triangle;
- Participation from five Heads of State and 20 ministers who made significant commitments to improve the conservation status of protected areas in their countries;
- The ceremonial arrival in Sydney of the Mua Voyagers from Fiji, the Cook Islands, Samoa and New Zealand, who travelled more than 6,000 km in ocean-going canoes (vaka) to deliver both a challenge and a promise from the many small island states affected by sea level rise and a rapidly changing climate;
- A call for much greater marine and ocean protection supported by commitments from several governments to expand marine protection to secure the ecosystem services on which livelihoods and food security depend, including in the high seas;
- The launch of the IUCN Green List of Protected Areas that recognizes those areas that are successful in meeting international standards for conserving biodiversity and ensuring equitable governance, accompanied by pledges from many countries to enhance the effectiveness of their protected areas and prevent the impacts of the illegal wildlife trade and exploitation;
- A renewed focus on the needs and aspirations of the new generation of people who will live in the world’s rapidly expanding cities and other human settlements, and whose attitudes towards nature can be shaped through early experiences of nature, and whose health and well-being can be enhanced by nature;
- The recognition that the diversity, quality and vitality of governance of the world’s protected and conserved areas is the foundation of sustainability, and pivotal to the role of protected areas in helping humanity address the demanding challenges of climate change, disaster-risk reduction and more generally the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

It is too soon to know precisely what the impact of Sydney will be. Even a 10 year horizon is very hard to predict in rapidly changing times, especially when world leaders have announced the need for huge investments in infrastructure that will place increasing pressure on wildlands, protected areas and biodiversity conservation in the next decades (Laurance et al., 2015). But the sheer scope and depth of the discussions over such an intense period will remain an inspiration for a new generation of conservation leaders. The challenge will be to fulfil the aspirations embodied in the Promise of Sydney, included

in full below, which was handed over to the IUCN President, Mr Zhang Xinsheng and adopted by acclamation at the Closing Plenary on 19 November 2014. It is now our joint opportunity and responsibility to maintain this momentum.

As the convenors of the IUCN World Parks Congress 2014, we would like to draw your attention to these significant outcomes embodied in the various components of The Promise of Sydney (See Box for the full text). We invite your further commitment and implementation of these innovative approaches to achieve a step-change in conservation by ensuring that protected areas continue to make their vital contribution to global sustainability in the decades ahead.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Inger Andersen**, a Danish national, is the Director General of IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature. She has been passionate about environmental sustainability and conservation since the beginning of her career. Prior to assuming this role in January 2015, she was the Vice President of the Middle East and North Africa at the World Bank, where she spent 15 years in various management positions related to environmental management and sustainability. She also worked for 15 years at the United Nations where she was UNDP's Coordinator for the Arab Region.

**Ernesto Enkerlin Hoeflich** is Chair of IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas. He is a prominent Mexican conservationist, environmentalist, opinion leader and researcher specialized in protected areas, ecosystem services, sustainability, biodiversity stewardship and rural development. From 2001 to 2010, he was National Commissioner for Protected Areas of Mexico (CONANP).

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Stream session © IISD/ENB ([www.iisd.ca/iucn/wpc/2014/](http://www.iisd.ca/iucn/wpc/2014/))

## THE PROMISE OF SYDNEY

Over 6,000 participants from 160 countries met at the IUCN World Parks Congress 2014 in Sydney, Australia. Acknowledging the traditional owners of the land where we met, we celebrated an enormous variety of inspiring ways of addressing the challenges facing the planet, through protected area approaches that respect and conserve nature, while benefitting human health and prosperity. We recognized that rebalancing the relationship between human society and nature is essential, and that ecosystems and their variety of life fully support our existence, cultural and spiritual identity, economies and well-being.

We celebrate the expansion and improved governance and management of protected and conserved areas around the world, and the leadership and initiatives of many regions, including the first ever Asia Parks Congress, since we met in Durban in 2003. In particular, we laud the establishment of new marine protected areas, as healthy oceans are critical to life on Earth and must be protected at much greater scale. We acknowledge the increasing role of Indigenous Peoples', community, and privately-conserved areas and territories in reaching biodiversity conservation and societal goals, and the opportunities presented by new communication and other technologies to better

understand and engage new constituencies, including young people in the world's rapidly expanding cities. We commend numerous improvements of corporate practice, and the many success stories and varied partnerships across sectors for nature conservation and sustainability.

Despite these advances, we recognize that threats to nature, its biological diversity and protected areas are now at the highest level in human history, due to a convergence at immense scale of the impacts of human consumption patterns, population growth, and industrial activity. Many protected and conserved areas are at risk or are poorly managed, and many rangers on the frontline have sacrificed everything for this cause. This reality must be faced directly, truthfully, and collaboratively. Bold vision and concerted action are required if we are to meet both conservation goals and human aspirations for current and future generations. There is no time to lose.

### **We, therefore:**

**Promise to INVIGORATE** ... our efforts to ensure that protected areas do not regress but rather progress. We will scale up protection in landscapes, wetlands and seascapes to represent all sites essential for the

conservation of nature, especially in the oceans. We will enhance diversity, quality and vitality in governance and management, including the appropriate recognition and support of areas conserved by Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and private entities. We will strive to promote sustainable land-uses and eliminate activities and policies that degrade, threaten or result in extinction or the loss of ecosystems and their biodiversity, including the rampant illegal wildlife trade and the impact of invasive alien species. We will recognize, respect, resource and support our frontline staff to do their often dangerous but always critical work.

**Promise to INSPIRE** ... all people, across generations, geography and cultures to experience the wonder of nature through protected areas, to engage their hearts and minds and engender a life-long association for physical, psychological, ecological, and spiritual well-being. We will motivate and engage a new generation of urban and rural communities, as an essential investment in the future of sustainability on the planet, and in the quality of life of people everywhere. Further, by working in partnership with and recognizing the long traditions and knowledge, collective rights and responsibilities of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to land, water, natural resource and culture, we will seek to redress and remedy past and continuing injustices in accord with international agreements.

**Promise to INVEST**... in nature's solutions, supported by public policy, incentives, tools and safeguards that help to halt biodiversity loss, mitigate and respond to climate change, reduce the risk and impact of disasters, improve food and water security, and promote human health and dignity. We will work to enable protected and conserved areas and their stewards to design and monitor effective, evidence-based and culturally appropriate responses to these challenges and to provide a compelling case for increased recognition, incentives, capacity and direct funding. We will encourage regional learning networks and initiatives that support these aims. We will collaborate with new partners to promote sustainable and equitable economies that respect planetary boundaries and social justice.

## OUR PROMISES

Commitments to fulfil the Promise of Sydney Vision were announced by many governments, organizations and individuals throughout the proceedings of the Congress.

Those made by governments, international organizations and civil society organizations during the Congress are listed in a register of promises: [worldparkscongress.org/about/promise\\_of\\_sydney\\_commitments.html](http://worldparkscongress.org/about/promise_of_sydney_commitments.html)

All patrons, champions, partners, participants and organizations commit to this Vision and to fulfilling our promises, commitments and undertakings. We commend our promises to IUCN, and the forums to be established that will continue the dialogues that will lead to the fulfilment of our Promises and this Vision. The IUCN President, in accepting the Promise of Sydney from the IUCN World Parks Congress 2014 invited further promises and commitments to be made.

These can be notified to [promiseofsydney@iucn.org](mailto:promiseofsydney@iucn.org) and will be added to the online register of promises.

## INNOVATIVE APPROACHES FOR PARKS, PEOPLE AND PLANET

A wealth of new and compelling solutions is at our fingertips, supported by inspired and committed women, men, and determined young people. We draw attention to the diverse contributions made in Sydney that provide **inspiring solutions** to achieve our vision across a vast array of issues, and that now provide a body of evidence and knowledge to overcome barriers to implementation. We will communicate and disseminate these innovative approaches, seek to work across sectors to recombine and apply promising approaches to addressing existing and new challenges. We offer a suite of **recommendations** designed to put these ideas into action, through new and innovative programmes, partnerships and funding, and will strive to take these into a strategic review of our respective organizations and initiatives.

The full suite of innovative approaches emanating from the Streams and Themes of the Congress can be found here: [worldparkscongress.org/about/promise\\_of\\_sydney\\_innovative\\_approaches.html](http://worldparkscongress.org/about/promise_of_sydney_innovative_approaches.html)

## A PANORAMA OF INSPIRING SOLUTIONS

With support from the Global Environment Facility through UNDP, and several partners, a platform for sharing and exchanging inspiring solutions has been established and will continue to be populated with examples from the IUCN World Parks Congress 2014 and the many organizations and individuals involved.

It can be found here: [worldparkscongress.org/about/promise\\_of\\_sydney\\_inspiring\\_solutions.html](http://worldparkscongress.org/about/promise_of_sydney_inspiring_solutions.html)

**RESUMEN**

El encuentro más importante de quienes intervienen en el quehacer de las áreas protegidas y conservadas en todo el mundo tuvo lugar en Sídney, Australia, en noviembre de 2014. El programa abarcó un amplio abanico de debates bajo el título *Los parques, la gente y el planeta: inspirando soluciones*. El evento tuvo como objetivo: (i) encontrar formas mejores y más justas para conservar la diversidad natural y cultural, haciendo partícipes a gobiernos, empresas y ciudadanos en el establecimiento y la gestión de los parques; (ii) inspirar a millones de personas en el mundo entero y a través de generaciones a relacionarse con la naturaleza; y (iii) demostrar que existen soluciones basadas en la naturaleza para enfrentar los desafíos de nuestro planeta como el cambio climático, la salud, y la seguridad alimentaria e hídrica. Más de 6000 personas participaron en una amplia gama de talleres, eventos, pabellones, diálogos de líderes mundiales, carteles electrónicos y visitas de campo, y ayudaron a elaborar una nueva visión del papel de las áreas protegidas en la década y las generaciones venideras. Este desafío, la Promesa de Sídney, fue entregado al Presidente de la UICN, el Sr. Zhang Xinsheng, y aprobado por aclamación en la sesión plenaria de clausura, el 19 de noviembre de 2014.

**RÉSUMÉ**

Le rassemblement le plus important au monde de personnes impliquées dans les aires protégées et conservées a eu lieu à Sydney en Australie en novembre 2014. Le programme englobait un vaste champ de discussions autour du thème « les parcs, la planète et nous : des solutions sources d'inspiration ». L'événement visait à: (i) trouver des moyens meilleurs et plus justes de conserver la diversité naturelle et culturelle, en impliquant gouvernements, entreprises et citoyens dans l'établissement et la gestion des parcs ; (ii) inciter les gens partout dans le monde et à travers les générations de se rapprocher de la nature ; et (iii) attester des solutions naturelles aux défis de la planète tels que le changement climatique, la santé, la nourriture et l'eau. Plus de 6000 participants ont pris part à un nombre varié d'ateliers, d'événements, de conférences et de dialogues avec les leaders mondiaux. Ils ont contribué élaborer pour les décennies à venir et les générations futures une nouvelle vision pour les aires protégées. Cet engagement, la Promesse de Sydney, a été transmis au Président de l'UICN, M. Zhang Xinsheng et adopté par acclamation à la séance plénière de clôture, le 19 novembre 2014.