



## EDITORIAL: DELIVERING THE PROMISE OF SYDNEY: FROM SYDNEY TO HAWAI'I

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In September, many of us participated in the World Conservation Congress (WCC), themed as *Planet at the Crossroads*, in Hawai'i. The congress was attended by more than 10,000 participants and concluded with the Hawai'i commitments<sup>1</sup>. The WCC was a great success with some exciting and inspirational events, and a strong focus on the importance of protected areas. WCC highlighted critical issues for conservation in the coming decades: the threats to biodiversity from habitat loss, climate change, invasive alien species, unsustainable exploitation, and pollution; the significance of the world's oceans for biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods; the role of protected areas and other ecosystem-based approaches in providing natural solutions for global challenges; solutions for conservation and sustainability that require a combination of traditional wisdom and modern knowledge; and the need to engage a broader spectrum of stakeholders in conservation action.

The WCC was the first big event in the conservation calendar since the World Parks Congress (WPC) in Sydney in 2014. It reiterated and reinforced many of the key messages, themes, recommendations and commitments embodied in the Promise of Sydney<sup>2</sup>. The WPC occurs only once every ten years and helps to set the agenda for the coming decade. Sydney emphasized the relevance and value of protected areas both as cornerstones for conserving nature, and as natural solutions to global challenges, providing benefits to human health, livelihoods and well-being. Much has happened in the two years since. Countries have adopted the Paris Agreement on Climate Change as well as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Protected areas have a clear role in delivering both. WCC was an opportunity to take stock on the Promise of Sydney and we have much to celebrate.

### RIDING THE WAVE: MARINE CONSERVATION

The WPC recommended that at least 30 per cent of our oceans should be fully protected areas, where extraction activities cease. A motion to this effect was approved by IUCN members at WCC in Hawai'i, and already we have seen progress, with many nations declaring very large marine protected areas (MPAs). These large-scale conservation efforts are exciting news and recognise that marine habitats and species throughout the ocean, including coral reefs, are coming under increasing pressure from overfishing, ocean warming and acidification.

Immediately prior to the WCC, President Obama expanded the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in Hawai'ian waters, making it one of the largest protected areas on the planet at 1,508,670 km<sup>2</sup>, protecting more than 7,000 marine species. Just two weeks after President Obama's declaration, the presidents of Ecuador, Colombia and Costa Rica agreed jointly to create a new marine reserve, including expanded protection of three UNESCO World Heritage sites: Malpelo, Cocos and the Galápagos. These declarations followed previous delivery of commitments made at WPC through designations of large-scale marine protected areas by the governments of French Polynesia (the approximately 5,000,000 km<sup>2</sup> Taini Atea marine managed area) and Palau (National Marine Sanctuary) covering their entire economic exclusive zones. The UK (Ascension and Pitcairn Islands), Chile (Easter Island and Nazca-Desventuradas Marine Parks) and New Zealand (Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary) have all also made significant declarations to declare large MPAs in the Pacific. And just last month the countries of the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) agreed to protect 1.5 million



The IUCN Members' Assembly at the World Conservation Congress (WCC) in Hawai'i © IUCN/Eric McNatt

km<sup>2</sup> of the Ross Sea, one of the most biologically diverse and untouched marine ecosystems in the world, for conservation including 1,117,000 km<sup>2</sup> of fully protected marine reserve.

Whilst this scale up in effort to protect large remote marine areas is very welcome, equal effort still needs to be expended in more inshore areas to protect ecosystems under immediate threat, and to restore degraded areas already damaged but using MPAs to given them space to recover. Above and beyond percentage targets more actions will be needed to make sure all these efforts form connected and well managed networks linked to sympathetic and truly sustainable management of the wider ocean.

### DELIVERING AICHI TARGET 11

Aichi Biodiversity Target 11, which focuses specifically on protected areas, states that: *By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscape and seascape.*

According to the latest *Protected Planet* report (IUCN & UNEP-WCMC, 2016), we are making good progress in protected area coverage, with 15 per cent of terrestrial habitats, 10 per cent of the coastal and marine areas within national jurisdiction, and approximately 4 per cent of the global ocean covered by MPAs, but there is still much to do on improving ecological representation and connectivity. Protected areas alone will not be sufficient to achieve full representation; instead we will need a mosaic of land and water uses that include interconnected protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), which together contribute to Target 11. The CBD is focusing on better definition and guidance on OECMs, with support from a WCPA task force. Additionally, we will need to promote more sustainable and biodiversity-friendly management of production landscapes and seascapes, which will contribute to better protection and management of biodiversity, including for example more sustainable fisheries and coastal zone management, which can contribute to achieving Aichi Target 6.

Even though we are making good progress on establishing, expanding and improving management of protected areas, the conservation agenda is often challenged by competing and conflicting development plans. This was a key concern at WPC so it is heartening

that IUCN members approved the ‘no-go’ motion 26 in Hawai‘i. This calls on governments to prohibit environmentally damaging industrial activities and infrastructure development in all IUCN categories of protected areas and not to de-gazette, downgrade or alter the boundaries of protected areas to facilitate environmentally damaging industrial activities and infrastructure development. In this regard, it is encouraging to learn that the Queensland Government in Australia is planning to create a new category of environmental protection for private land with high biodiversity value, which would allow landowners the opportunity to have equal environmental protection to that of national parks, to guard against mining and coal seam gas.

### **PROTECTED AREAS AS NATURAL SOLUTIONS TO GLOBAL CHALLENGES**

Justifying further expansion and support for protected areas requires much greater understanding and appreciation of the socioeconomic benefits that they can provide. There is an expanding literature on the contributions that protected areas can make as natural solutions to global challenges such as water security, disaster risk reduction, food security and human health and wellbeing, all themes discussed at WPC (Dudley et al., 2010; Dudley, 2015). Climate change, for example, remains one of the most pressing global challenges confronting human societies today. Healthy ecosystems – terrestrial, freshwater, marine and coastal – can act as powerful carbon sinks and stores, and provide the basis for resilience to climate change impacts. Nature-based solutions, such as protected areas, have become widely recognized as an essential component of a comprehensive approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Protected areas can sequester carbon and help communities adapt to climate change, reduce the risk and impact of natural disasters, and support sustainable livelihoods. Connected systems of protected areas, when effectively managed and governed, deliver biodiversity conservation as well as a wide range of ecosystem services that contribute to human welfare and livelihoods.

As follow up to the WPC, the protected area leadership in South America collaborated through REDPARQUES to adopt a declaration by 18 Latin American countries in August 2015 to integrate protected areas into national climate change strategies (Miranda Londoño et al., 2016). This declaration was followed up at UNFCCC 21 in Paris where several countries committed to the expansion and strengthening of protected areas as part of their national plans. Colombia, for instance, committed

to add 2.5 million hectares of new terrestrial and marine protected areas as part of Colombia’s Intended National Contribution. This exciting South American initiative has great potential for replication in other regions.

Protected areas as natural solutions will also be key tools in delivering the SDGs agreed in 2015. Protected areas are not just key to achieving those SDGs that deal specifically with conservation and wise use of oceans (SDG14) and terrestrial ecosystems (SDG15), but are also central to the goals that relate to access to clean water (SDG6), health (SDG3), food security (SDG2) and climate action (SDG13). They can also contribute to peace and security (SDG16) and poverty eradication (SDG1). Strengthening and disseminating the arguments about the socioeconomic benefits of protected areas and their contribution to the SDGs will be critical in promoting further conservation efforts post 2020.

### **LOOKING FORWARD: THE ROLE OF THE WORLD COMMISSION ON PROTECTED AREAS (WCPA)**

Reflecting on progress since WPC, it is clear that much has been achieved. But there is still much more to do to fully realize all the commitments of the Promise of Sydney. We are now only four years away from 2020 when we need to report on the Aichi Targets in the Biodiversity Strategic Plan agreed in 2010.

During the next four years, WCPA will focus on:

- Increasing the number and quality of protected areas (terrestrial, freshwater and marine) to achieve the Aichi Targets for halting biodiversity loss, in particular through meeting Aichi Target 11.
- Strengthening our work on governance across all categories of protected areas.
- Mainstreaming protected areas as natural solutions to existing and emerging global challenges such as climate change, disaster risk reduction, food and water security, and exploring and promoting linkages between protected areas and spiritual, physical and mental health.
- Helping to define post-2020 biodiversity targets and promoting protected areas as a valuable tool to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

All of these goals, embodied in the WCPA mandate, are closely aligned with IUCN’s Programme 2017-2020 adopted by the Congress. WCPA will underpin these efforts with a strong emphasis on developing capacity and improving professional standards for protected area managers, including capacity development for indigenous and community managers. Building on the



Kathy MacKinnon (left) and Julia Miranda Londoño (right)  
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WPC there has been a recognition that much greater effort must be concentrated on outreach and communication to reconnect people with nature and engage a broader constituency in conservation, by encouraging youth, urban populations, new migrants, political leaders and disadvantaged sectors of society to engage with protected areas. Already we are reaching out to new partners and sectors through the #NatureforAll programme<sup>3</sup> launched in Hawai'i and new initiatives that are exploring the nexus between nature, health and urban communities<sup>4</sup>.

Hawai'i was a great congress, but it was just one stop on the journey from Sydney and delivery of the promises and commitments made there in 2014. The next four years will be critical to delivering progress on the Aichi Targets and defining the conservation and protected area agenda beyond 2020. As we move forward from the Planet at the Crossroads congress, the Promise of Sydney continues to provide a useful roadmap.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> [portals.iucn.org/congress/hawaii-commitments](http://portals.iucn.org/congress/hawaii-commitments)

<sup>2</sup> [worldparkscongress.org/about/promise\\_of\\_sydney\\_commitments.html](http://worldparkscongress.org/about/promise_of_sydney_commitments.html)

<sup>3</sup> [www.natureforall.global/](http://www.natureforall.global/)

<sup>4</sup> [www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/import/downloads/salzburg\\_challenge\\_558\\_nature\\_health\\_and\\_a\\_new\\_urban\\_generation\\_v7.pdf](http://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/import/downloads/salzburg_challenge_558_nature_health_and_a_new_urban_generation_v7.pdf)

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Kathy MacKinnon** was elected chair of WCPA for the next four years at IUCN's World Conservation Congress in September 2016. She was formerly Lead Biodiversity Specialist at the World Bank and has considerable experience in planning and managing protected areas in developing countries, especially in Asia.

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