

021 For an international framework for the preservation of watershed heads and the strengthening of their resilience in a changing climate

ACKNOWLEDGING Goal A and Targets 2, 3, 7, 8, 14, 21 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, aimed at maintaining, enhancing and restoring the integrity, connectivity and resilience of all ecosystems by 2050, and restoring 30% of degraded land and inland waters by 2030;

RECALLING IUCN Resolution 7.008 *Protecting rivers and their associated ecosystems as corridors in a changing climate* (Marseille, 2020);

CONCERNED about the average decline of 84% in freshwater vertebrate populations between 1970 and 2016 (Synchronicity Earth, 2018), the increasing demand for water, energy and food, the lack of funds for freshwater ecosystems, as well as water-related conflicts linked to the climate crisis (6th Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change);

CONSIDERING watershed heads as the basins of Strahler rank 1 and 2 watercourses at a scale of 1:25,000;

RECOGNISING the important role of wetlands and forest and agricultural areas in maintaining the ecological integrity and water quality of the main watercourse, and including their protection and sustainable management as a priority in basin-wide planning efforts;

RECALLING the importance of watersheds that are resilient to climate fluctuations, ensuring retention, filtration and availability of water, the genesis of hydrological, sedimentary and biological flows while constituting reservoirs of biodiversity and geodiversity;

KNOWING that the connectivity (ecological and sedimentary) of watershed heads is crucial for their role as refuge and reservoir of biodiversity and geodiversity;

APPRECIATING that these watershed heads are extremely sensitive to disturbances, particularly degradation and pollution;

RECOGNISING that supporting healthy ecosystems strengthens ecosystem resilience;

CONCERNED about the increasing damage to aquatic ecosystems at the watershed heads, impacting their hydrology, water quality, hydromorphology and biodiversity, as well as their connectivity with the basin; and

AWARE of the vital role of watershed heads for food production and human survival;

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025, at its session in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates:

1. CALLS ON the Director General and IUCN Members to:

a. support the exchange of experiences and best practices to preserve aquatic ecosystems at watershed heads;

b. encourage any effective action aimed at understanding, protecting, improving and enhancing these ecosystems and their financing;

c. encourage States to allocate adequate public budgets; and

d. call for the development of region-specific guidelines for arid and semi-arid countries in the implementation of watershed resilience frameworks; and

2. INVITES States and subnational governments to:

- a. include in their public policies frameworks and regulations for the protection and restoration of watershed heads;
- b. assess and improve mechanisms for protecting the natural functions and dynamics of these ecosystems;
- c. take an inventory of developments hindering hydromorphological dynamics and encourage States to establish a system for monitoring and assessing their impact on ecosystems;
- d. set improvement targets based on international and national indicators (biodiversity, geodiversity, hydrology, ecosystems, groundwater, etc.);
- e. extend financial support and support the mobilisation of financial support from other sources for the management and protection of watersheds;
- f. encourage the adoption of sustainable and climate-resilient practices in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, such as agroecology, reduced pesticide use and locally appropriate reforestation strategies to protect natural resources; and
- g. include in their public policies the identification, protection and monitoring of these ecosystems with a sustainable financing mechanism.