

018 Advancing and tracking global river conservation to meet biodiversity and climate goals

RECALLING IUCN Resolution 4.065 *Freshwater biodiversity conservation, protected areas, and management of transboundary waters* (Barcelona, 2008) and Resolution 7.008 *Protecting rivers and their associated ecosystems as corridors in a changing climate* (Marseille, 2020);

RECOGNISING that IUCN's 20-year Strategic Vision includes “improving land use planning and use of protected and conserved areas to safeguard freshwater resources, including free flowing rivers”;

RECALLING ALSO the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (1992 Water Convention), which promotes cooperation for sustainable water resource management and can enhance synergies with IUCN's freshwater conservation work;

RECOGNISING ALSO the importance of non-perennial freshwater systems, such as wadis and seasonal streams, especially in arid and semi-arid regions, and the need to reflect their role in biodiversity and climate resilience;

ACKNOWLEDGING that riverine and freshwater ecosystem conservation contributes significantly to the commitments of countries under several multilateral accords such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) Targets 1 to 3, the Convention on Wetlands, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the global goal on adaptation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change;

ALARMED that despite their importance in sustaining natural and cultural heritage and supporting ecosystem-based climate adaptation, including as flood and drought buffers, rivers are among the most threatened ecosystems on Earth (~85% decline in freshwater vertebrate populations since 1970), and are increasingly threatened by humans;

HIGHLIGHTING the significance of river conservation in safeguarding the human right to water, principles of non-discrimination, and prioritising the needs of Indigenous peoples, local communities, women and children;

NOTING that effective conservation requires large-scale protected habitats linked by corridors across terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine areas to maintain ecological networks and processes across borders;

EMPHASISING the need for stronger cooperation and effective action for ecosystem sustainability, species protection and the well-being of river-dependent communities; and

RECOGNISING FURTHER that IUCN can provide a discussion forum for the key role of international voluntary initiatives such as the Bonn Challenge, the Global Mangrove Alliance (GMA), the Global Peatlands Initiative (GPI) and the Freshwater Challenge (FWC) in facilitating tangible bottom-up action on the aforementioned agreements;

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

1. URGES Commissions and Members to promote those parts of IUCN's 20-year Strategic Vision noted above and collaborate with the Global River Protection Coalition (GRPC) and other organisations to develop guidance for a voluntary, trans-scalar and transboundary river conservation tracking system to augment the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre's (UNEP-WCMC) Protected Planet;

2. REQUESTS Members, States and Government Agency Members to voluntarily share river conservation information to aid in developing the tracking system as described above;

3. ENCOURAGES State Members and non-governmental organisations to:

a. work with civil society, Indigenous peoples, local communities, the private sector and stakeholders to conserve free-flowing river reaches that provide critical habitats, services or resilience; and

b. foster partnerships to strengthen cooperative transboundary river governance;

4. URGES governments, especially Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands to:

a. include targets and indicators on river conservation in national plans, amendments and KMGBF Targets 1 to 3 implementation activities;

b. support UNEP-WCMC in tracking coverage of rivers by protected and conserved areas and by reporting river-focused conservation designations;

c. review and clarify protected and conserved area laws to include explicit river conservation mechanisms and facilitate practical implementation, where relevant;

d. harmonise United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change plans with National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans to avoid degrading riverine ecosystems with significant biodiversity, cultural heritage, sustainable development and/or climate resilience and adaptation value; and

e. include clear objectives and measurable indicators in national plans, as well as in national and international legislation, aimed at the protection, maintenance, and/or restoration of geodiversity elements, such as the active geological processes that shape and sustain river systems; and

5. REQUESTS IUCN to promote the visibility of arid-region freshwater conservation efforts in its knowledge products and reporting, ensuring that the unique characteristics and challenges of these ecosystems are appropriately represented.