

076 Regulating the environmental impacts of overtourism and promoting sustainable tourism models for biodiversity protection

NOTING that global tourism has grown exponentially in recent years, with 95% of global tourists visiting less than 5% of the Earth's landmass, leading to tourist congestion and numerous negative socio-ecological consequences, including overconsumption of natural resources, habitat degradation, pollution, biodiversity loss and increased greenhouse gas emissions;

RECOGNISING that mass tourism often exceeds the environmental carrying capacity of protected and sensitive areas, such as marine ecosystems, mountainous regions and habitats of vulnerable species, leading to conflicts with local communities and long-term ecological damage;

AWARE of the role played by organisations worldwide in dealing with this phenomenon, the increasing public opposition to overtourism and the urgent need for decision-makers to regulate tourism activities with a holistic approach that includes all stakeholders, ensuring biodiversity conservation while maintaining the economic benefits of tourism;

EMPHASISING that sustainable tourism, when properly managed, can support biodiversity conservation, community resilience and local economic development, as highlighted by IUCN Resolution 6.060 *Improving standards in ecotourism* (Hawai'i, 2016), Resolution 7.130 *Strengthening sustainable tourism's role in biodiversity conservation and community resilience* (Marseille, 2020) and Resolution 1.032 *Ecotourism and Protected Areas Conservation* (Montreal, 1996), as well as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution on the promotion of ecotourism;

RECALLING that the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) promotes sustainable tourism as a key contributor to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and that the Nature Positive Tourism Initiative – jointly supported by UN Tourism, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), and the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance (SHA) – seeks to align the tourism sector with global biodiversity goals by halting and reversing nature loss; and AWARE that the large-scale deployment of sustainable tourism could mitigate overtourism's negative impacts and ensure the effective management, restoration and sustainable use of affected ecosystems; and

COMMITTING to the development of policies, regulations and awareness campaigns to promote sustainable tourism models based on ecological limits and community participation, ensuring that tourism respects the fragility and resilience of natural areas;

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

1. REQUESTS the Director General to:

a. strengthen collaboration with subnational governments (cities, local and regional authorities) and tourism stakeholders to ensure sustainable tourism management; and

b. urge international organisations and UN programmes (e.g. UNWTO, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Development Programme, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Convention on Biological Diversity) to incorporate ecosystem fragility into tourism policies, promoting conservation, restoration and community-led sustainable use of natural resources;

2. CALLS ON the Director General and IUCN internal bodies to:

a. develop guidelines for assessing Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) and also Environmental Carrying Capacity (ECC), where necessary, in protected and sensitive areas, providing tools to regulate tourism activities effectively, in order to preserve the site's environmental values and ecological integrity, while also contributing to improving the quality of tourism experiences; and

b. encourage the adoption of international sustainability standards, such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC), in national and local tourism policies;

3. CALLS ON the World Commission on Protected Areas to:

- a. engage tourism stakeholders in knowledge exchange on best practices for preventing and mitigating overtourism; and
- b. support research on quantifying overtourism's local environmental impacts, facilitating data-driven policymaking; and

4. INVITES IUCN Members and affiliate Members to:

- a. implement regulations, standards, policies and/or best practices on tourism activities in fragile ecosystems, including measures for limits on cruise ships, vehicle access and visitors in protected areas;
- b. promote tourism diversification, such as ecotourism, hunting tourism, agro-tourism and cultural experiences, to reduce ecological pressure, distribute visitor flows more equitably and enhance long-term community gains; and
- c. launch awareness campaigns on responsible tourism, targeting both tourists and local communities, to emphasise biodiversity conservation and sustainable travel practices.