

130 Strengthening protective measures for protected areas against unsustainable tourism development

EMPHASISING the need for strict compliance with IUCN guidelines for protected area categories I and II, which prohibit resource exploitation and large-scale infrastructure development in core zones; and FURTHER EMPHASISING the primary objective of all protected area categories to conserve nature while limiting human activities – including tourism – to those compatible with the primary management objective;

RECALLING previous IUCN Resolutions, including 1.032 *Ecotourism and Protected Areas Conservation* (Montreal, 1996), 6.060 *Improving standards in ecotourism* (Hawai'i, 2016) and 7.130 *Strengthening sustainable tourism's role in biodiversity conservation and community resilience* (Marseille, 2020), which highlight the importance of sustainable tourism and its role in conservation, while acknowledging the challenges it presents;

NOTING that tourism is often used to justify the designation and management of protected areas and to generate income for local communities, but that it is often poorly planned and lacks environmental and social sustainability assessments and mechanisms to monitor and control impacts;

CONCERNED about trends in mass tourism that lead to habitat destruction, pollution, fragmentation and climate impacts, further stressing ecosystems that are already threatened by climate change;

ALARMED by the legislative changes in Albania, through Law No. 21 (2024), that allow large-scale infrastructure development, including 5-star hotels, in the core zones of national parks and other protected areas, undermining their conservation objectives, contrary to IUCN recommendations and sustainable conservation principles, by removing significant legal barriers to development within sensitive ecosystems and allowing tourism activities that weaken the protection measures for core zones; and

EMPHASISING that such changes pose a threat to natural heritage, ecosystem resilience and climate adaptation efforts by reducing natural carbon sinks and increasing greenhouse gas emissions;

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

1. REQUESTS the IUCN Director General to support Albania in revising its legal framework and strengthening monitoring and enforcement practices;
2. CALLS on the World Commission on Protected Areas to update the 2018 IUCN publication 'Tourism and visitor management in protected areas' guidelines for sustainability to reflect the challenges of modern tourism and the impacts of climate change, report on the findings and make recommendations at the next Congress;
3. CALLS ON IUCN Members to recognise protected areas as conservation priorities and seek to align their management with IUCN guidelines and principles, particularly the IUCN Green List Standard and tourism best practices, where applicable;
4. CALLS ON governments to prohibit the development of environmentally damaging mass tourism and excessive tourism infrastructure in IUCN protected area categories I and II, and to take measures to ensure that all tourism activities are compatible with the conservation objectives of these areas, through environmental and social impact assessments, strategic environmental assessments and appropriate regulations;
5. URGES the Government of Albania to amend Law No. 21 (2024) to restore protection from environmentally damaging developments and enforce compliance with international conservation standards; and CALLS ON all other governments to review and strengthen their legislative frameworks to align with these standards, ensuring the protection of core zones in protected areas worldwide;

6. RECOMMENDS partnerships between governments, non-governmental organisations and the private sector to promote sustainable tourism while evaluating ecotourism practices through standardised assessments and developing a voluntary self-assessment and awareness tool for tourism operators, particularly in developing countries, to support capacity building and alignment with conservation priorities; and

7. ENCOURAGES the development and integration of legal indicators to monitor the implementation of tourism regulations within protected areas, including indicators to assess compliance with restrictions on mass tourism infrastructure, evaluate the effectiveness of environmental and social impact assessments, verify compatibility of tourism activities with conservation objectives, and ensure transparency through regular, publicly accessible reporting.