Cut emissions, not corners – with nature as our ally Fauna & Flora's priorities for COP28



A note from Kristian Teleki CEO, Fauna & Flora



The science is clear and unequivocal. Human induced climate change and biodiversity loss are severe and interconnected crises, a threat to human wellbeing, and cannot be addressed successfully in isolation.

There is no pathway to meeting the Paris Goals without the protection and restoration of nature, and the empowerment of local people on the frontline of this effort. The outcomes from COP28 must reflect this.

We cannot afford more delays on action. As Catherine McKenna, Canada's former Minister of Environment and Climate Change and chair of the UN High-Level Expert Group, underscored: we must "cut emissions, not corners."

Drawing on the best available science and evidence, this report defines five priority areas for focus at COP28 together with detailed recommendations for decision makers, with a particular emphasis on what we need to see in the first Global Stocktake, which will conclude at COP28. The first Global Stocktake (see Box 1) will conclude at COP28. Beyond reflecting on what has and hasn't worked so far, it offers a key opportunity to provide solutionoriented, actionable guidance for countries on how to close the yawning ambition and implementation gaps.

We already know that nature has a key part to play. The pivotal Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)¹ spells out how the protection and restoration of nature can help us adapt to climate change and prevent the worst warming scenarios. It emphasises that, with nature at the heart of a just, green transition, *the economic benefits of limiting global warming will vastly outweigh the costs* (including the costs of both action and inaction).

Nature can provide one-third² of the emissions reductions needed by 2030, but investment needs to almost triple by 2030³ and increase to over USD 536 billion per year by 2050 to fully enable high quality nature-based solutions to address climate change at scale. We look to the Global Stocktake output to guide Parties to act on this.

Nature-based solutions to address climate change (see Box 2) are a critical tool in the international response to these crises – a fact that was recognised in the COP27 decision.

But pledges on paper need to become action, now.

COP28 must challenge nations and businesses to increase ambition, invest more in nature-positive transformations, and live up to their commitments to limit global warming to 1.5°C through a just transition.

Fauna & Flora is highlighting five priority areas for focus at COP28, based on the best available science and evidence. Our aim is to drive discussion, debate and – most importantly – action that delivers for climate, nature and people.

Fauna & Flora's priority areas for COP28:

- Driving rapid, deep emissions cuts and phasing out fossil fuels and harmful subsidies
- Ensuring high-integrity nature-based solutions
- Prioritising the protection of nature's remaining carbon sinks
- Accelerating adaptation action with communities and nature at its core
- Scaling up and directing finance to locally led approaches

BOX 1

The Paris Agreement's Global Stocktake process is designed to assess countries' collective progress toward the Agreement's long-term goals (reducing greenhouse gas emissions, building resilience to climate impacts, and securing finance and support to address climate change) every five years, with the first ever Stocktake to be concluded during COP28. This stocktaking process is aimed at informing the next round of Nationally Determined Contributions in order to increase their level of ambition, and offers the opportunity to evaluate the need for enhanced action and support.

BOX 2

Nature-based solutions are actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified ecosystems (terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine). These solutions should address social, economic and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing benefits for human well-being, ecosystem services and resilience, and biodiversity.4

Driving rapid, deep emissions cuts and phasing out fossil fuels and harmful subsidies

As the Global Stocktake Technical Dialogue Synthesis Report⁵ emphasised, there are **substantial gaps** that need to be bridged in both the mitigation *ambition* of Nationally Determined Contributions and the *implementation* of measures to achieve their targets.

According to the IPCC, if we are to successfully limit global warming to 1.5°C, we must achieve net zero carbon dioxide emissions globally by the early 2050s.¹ Every fraction of a degree matters, so – to avoid cascading impacts and tipping points causing further harm to people and nature – we need to limit global warming to 1.5°C with as little overshoot as possible.

But, as data scientist, Dr Hannah Ritchie points out⁶, **it's not just where you end up, but how you get there that matters.** To keep 1.5°C within reach, greenhouse gas emissions must peak before 2025 and decline rapidly thereafter – reaching a 43% reduction by 2030 and 60% by 2035 below 2019 levels, recognising that peaking may take longer for developing countries. Currently we are not on track to achieve a 1.5°C mitigation pathway.

In Figure 1, the area under the emissions reduction curve represents a country's or company's cumulative emissions, indicating how much it contributes to climate change. The graphs show that the more quickly they reduce emissions, the lower their overall emissions on the way to net zero. Therefore, long-term net zero goals should be underpinned by ambitious and credible short-term targets, detailed implementation plans and adequate finance. The pace, effectiveness and credibility of the approaches to cut emissions are essential to success.

The Global Stocktake Technical Dialogue Synthesis report also acknowledges that a rapid reduction of the world economy's reliance on fossil fuels, and speedy transition towards clean energy, is central for reaching global net zero. It highlights that **energy system mitigation measures** – like phasing out unabated fossil fuels and scaling up the use of renewable energy – **could account for three-quarters** of total global mitigation to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions targets.

Figure 1: Net zero: it's not just where you end up, but how you get there that matters.

A country can reach 'net-zero' emissions by 2050, but the pathway it takes to get there matters for its contributions to climate change. Cumulative emissions is the area under each curve. The blue scenario emits 1,000 million tonnes to 2050; the red emits 2,500 million tonnes. 2.5-times as much.



Reduce early: Gradual CO₂ reductions (1 billion tonnes to 2050) Delay action: Last-minute CO₂ cuts (2.5 billion tonnes to 2050)

What is the way forward?

- Parties must submit enhanced emissions targets for 2030 and 2035, responding to the clear message from scientists that action is needed now for the sake of current and future generations, and the diversity of life on Earth. The Global Stocktake should provide guidance on strengthening accountability and accelerating decarbonisation across the economy, underpinned by rapid phasing out of fossil fuels and scaling up of renewables. Effective action will be driven by fair, rigorous and transparent net zero emission targets from nation states and non-state actors, including the private sector (following the UN High-Level Expert Group's recommendations⁷), supported by concrete implementation plans, reporting and adequate finance.
- Decarbonisation efforts must not cause new drivers of nature destruction, and this should be emphasised in the Global Stocktake output. Technical innovation and moving towards a more circular economy will have a critical role to play in the green and blue transition but must be approached with care. For example, Fauna & Flora highlights⁸ the importance of a global moratorium on deep-sea mining given the profound risks of destabilising deep ocean ecosystems in a race to secure critical minerals for new technologies in the 'green transition'.

Countries and financial institutions must push to end subsidies and financing of fossil fuels - this must be a key message in the Global Stocktake output. Likewise, we need countries to pursue new and innovative taxation to generate resources for climate finance, including a tax on fossil fuel companies - and their booming profits - that could be redirected to the green energy transition and those who suffer the most from climate change impacts. Finance should be redirected in order to triple⁹ renewable energy capacity and double energy efficiency globally by 2030.

2 Ensuring high-integrity nature-based solutions

Nature-based solutions to climate change are proven, readily scalable and cost-effective tools¹⁰ to support and accelerate the transition to a net zero future, while also driving positive climate, biodiversity and social impact at scale.

The IPCC highlighted that the effective and equitable conservation and sustainable management of 30% to 50% of Earth's land, freshwater and ocean areas¹¹ would not only protect biodiversity and critical carbon sinks but would also help make ecosystems more resilient to the effects of climate change and ensure essential ecosystem services related to health and food and water security are maintained.

The 'Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use' sector offers substantial potential¹² to reduce net emissions by 2030 at a relatively low cost through related climate mitigation options. For example, reducing the conversion of natural ecosystems offers the second greatest mitigation potential just after solar energy. These measures aren't costly either – those costing less than USD 20 per tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO_2eq) are estimated to make up more than half of this potential. What's more, transitioning to a sustainable food and agriculture sector not only brings climate, social and biodiversity benefits,¹³ it also represents a USD 4.5 trillion opportunity.¹⁴

In the marine context, mangroves, tidal marshes and seagrasses are known as blue carbon ecosystems due to the vast amounts of carbon they store. By restoring them we could sequester an additional 841 million tonnes of CO_2 eq per year from the atmosphere by 2030,¹⁵ collectively amounting to ~3% of global emissions.

When used in tandem with ambitious and rapid decarbonisation, Fauna & Flora believes **nature-based carbon credits** have an important role to play in accelerating the green transition, by channelling finance into the long-term conservation of biodiverse ecosystems and to local people.

However, appropriate guardrails must ensure that the growing demand for nature-based solutions does not drive a race to the bottom, i.e. an over-reliance on offsetting and declining offset quality.

Fauna & Flora supports nature-based solutions that are applied appropriately in the context of wider decarbonisation priorities, and developed to high standards that deliver positive impacts for biodiversity, people and climate, as outlined in our recommendations;

What is the way forward?

- Nature-based solutions projects and programmes must demonstrate an integrated and holistic strategy to reduce emissions, ensuring high integrity with respect to climate change mitigation, ecosystems, biodiversity and people as outlined in Fauna & Flora's Position on High Integrity Nature-Based Carbon Markets.¹⁶ Given the intense scrutiny currently facing the voluntary carbon market, this is more important than ever. For nature-based solutions to be effective, equitable and enduring as climate solutions they must also be underpinned by, and effectively deliver, benefits for both nature and for Indigenous People and local communities, and must respect people's use of, and cultural values associated with, biodiversity. These benefits are core to high quality nature-based solutions, and it is critical that the Global Stocktake output emphasises this.
- As a vital mechanism to accelerate progress towards the Paris goals, we need to see action to finance and accelerate implementation of both terrestrial and marine nature-based solutions. This means embedding nature-based solutions into Nationally Determined Contributions and non-state actors' plans, so the Global Stocktake output should push for this to happen across the board. Nature-based solutions should be used as carbon offsets *only* to counterbalance unabated emissions *and alongside* real decarbonisation actions. The Global Stocktake should encourage companies to put in place a science-based target for reducing scope 1-3 emissions,¹⁷ aligned with the Paris goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C.
- Harmful agricultural subsidies should be repurposed to support the health of ecosystems, people and climate. More funding is needed for the urgent transformation of food systems to shift away from carbon-intensive, ecosystem-degrading and chemical-dependent agriculture to agroecology, agroforestry and other sustainable food production systems. Adopting agroecological principles and practices will underpin healthy and productive food systems that are resilient and sustainable in a changing climate, as well as help maintain livelihoods, food security and halt biodiversity loss.
- Harmful fisheries subsidies should be reduced in line with the agreement reached by the World Trade Organization, which countries should urgently ratify. Transformation in the fisheries sector is lagging behind other ocean sectors in terms of emissions reductions, and urgent efforts should be made to progress the ocean food system towards sustainable, low-carbon and socially just solutions.

Output States of the protection of nature's remaining carbon sinks

The more nature is degraded, the more we erode its ability to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Continued degradation of nature also undermines the resilience of local livelihoods and represents a systemic risk and cost to the global economy.¹⁸ The carbon-rich, biodiverse carbon sinks and stores that underpin climate regulation are not secure and, once lost, can never be brought back.

The Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use sector accounted for 13-21% of global greenhouse gas emissions, principally driven by deforestation.¹⁹ So, we need a rapid paradigm shift in the way we protect and restore natural ecosystems – one that is based on sound science, guided by local and Indigenous knowledge systems, supported by fair governance and incentivised by long-term funding mechanisms.

We argue that avoiding further loss of nature is so critical that the nature-based response to climate change should follow a principle of *protection first*. While well-designed restoration measures have a vital role in degraded areas, efforts to protect and reduce threats to existing, intact, high priority ecosystems should be prioritised over nature-based carbon removals. This is essential to avoid further loss of irreplaceable biodiversity and carbon stocks, but also to enable significant additional carbon storage potential of these ecosystems.²⁰ Their protection must now be the urgent priority, as outlined in Fauna & Flora's Position on High Integrity Nature-Based Markets.¹⁶

What is the way forward?

- Parties must meaningfully link the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) processes so that they are aligned in their ambition, pace of action and resourcing to enable the protection of nature with the full participation of Indigenous People and local communities. Integrated approaches on nature and climate should be reflected in the decisions on the Global Stocktake, the Global Goal on Adaptation and the post-2025 climate finance goal. We are also calling on countries to link national implementation plans and strategies such as Nationally Determined Contributions, National Adaptation Plans and the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.
- Alongside more action to prioritise the protection and conservation of intact natural areas (to avoid further loss of both biodiversity and maintain their crucial role in stabilising climate), governments must strictly follow through on the pledge to eliminate forest loss by 2030 as reflected in the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use.
- Parties must urgently finalise the carbon rules and guidance under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement to direct much-needed funds to incentivise and compensate for the protection and conservation of carbon-rich, biodiverse carbon sinks, building on proven standards and methodologies.
- Clarity is needed on how blue carbon can best be addressed in carbon accounting for political jurisdictions and national REDD+ programs. Fauna & Flora also calls for enhanced support for ocean carbon cycle research, including gathering evidence on the carbon released by deep sea mining and bottom trawling fishing practices to inform the development of policies.

Chief Emmanuel Wesseh (standing, left) worked with other traditional leaders to halt illegal mining in Liberia's Sapo National Park, an area that is rich in both biodiversity and carbon. © Christian Cooper / Fauna & Flora

Accelerating adaptation action with communities and nature at its core

Impacts of climate change are increasingly being felt around the globe, yet the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report noted that – to date – adaptation action is, "small scale and incremental and not transformational." The Global Goal on Adaptation framework should be designed to inform the Global Stocktake and vice versa; and a clear plan for putting the framework into action should be agreed at COP28 to drive the necessary transformational change for adaptation.

The IPCC highlights the value of ecosystem-based adaptation (see Box 3) as an effective way to reduce the impacts of climate change while at the same time delivering additional benefits for people and biodiversity. Healthy, biodiverse ecosystems are the cornerstone of climate resilience, and nature-blind adaptation action can lead to significant risks, including maladaptation (such as false sense of security behind inadequate seawalls).

At the same time, locally led, inclusive and rights-based approaches should play a central role in designing and delivering effective, sustainable, and just adaptation action. It is local communities, including Indigenous and marginalised groups, who have the on-theground knowledge of their adaptation needs and are best able to develop locally appropriate, bottom-up, transformative solutions to tackle the underlying drivers of inequality, poverty, climate change, and the degradation of nature. Local ownership is also critical for effective management and long-term sustainability.

BOX 3

Ecosystem-based adaptation is a naturebased solution that harnesses biodiversity and ecosystem services to increase resilience and reduce the vulnerability of human communities and natural systems to climate change.²¹ Examples include sustainable, climate-smart agriculture; agroecological approaches (e.g. agroforestry); integrated water resource management; coastal protection via mangrove rehabilitation; and sustainable forest, livestock and fisheries management.

Inequity and marginalisation linked to gender, ethnicity and low incomes mean that the worst impacts of climate change are faced by those who have contributed the least to this existential crisis, and who also have the fewest resources available to help cope with its effects. With every partial degree of warming, the various limits to our ability to adapt to climate change are being reached, leading to losses and damages. Communities on the frontline are already paying too high a price for climate inaction – there is no time to waste.

What is the way forward?

 Parties must embed effective, high-quality ecosystem-based adaptation solutions and locally led approaches into National Adaptation Plans, Nationally Determined Contributions and other national and sectoral plans and policies with robust targets, indicators and defined metrics across the adaptation cycle. This will mean governments investing in identifying local-level climate risks, vulnerabilities and adaptation options based on best available science, local knowledge systems and participatory approaches. Fauna & Flora endorsed the Principles of Locally Led Adaptation²² at COP26 and we encourage governments, funding institutions, and others in the adaptation space to also embed them into their operations. Doña Isidrio is an agroecological farmer on the island of Ometepe in Nicaragua, who has been working with Fauna & Flora's local partner Biometepe to set up a native tree and plant nursery on her farm. Fauna & Flora has been working with islanders at this UNESCO Biosphere Reserve for well over a decade to support more climate-resilient and sustainable use of natural resources. © Alison Gunn, Fauna & Flora

- Parties must recognise the key role of locally led, ecosystem-based approaches, along with the need to scale up implementation of these, in the decisions on the Global Goal on Adaptation and the Global Stocktake. This will enable accelerated progress on adaptation action, including prioritising and scaling community-driven ecosystem-based adaptation in countries' climate resilient development.
- The monitoring and evaluation systems for the Global Goal on Adaptation must be able to accommodate the broad diversity of contexts and local actions across the adaptation cycle and thematic areas, allowing to use a mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators, and these systems should feed into the Global Stocktake. Frameworks that can help assess the efficacy, adequacy and integrity of locally led and ecosystem-based adaptation approaches include FEBA's Defining Qualification Criteria and Quality Standards,²³ IUCN's nature-based solutions²⁴ and the Principles of Locally Led Adaptation.²²
- Given the dramatic loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services caused by climate change, we need to systematically assess and respond to the direct and indirect consequences for local livelihoods (including impacts beyond monetary terms, such as loss of culture, identities and natural heritage). We request the IPCC to prepare a special report on loss and damage risks, including assessment of economic and non-economic losses and damages at different global temperature levels, with recommendations on how to avert, minimise and address these. We urge countries to finalise details of the funding arrangements of the Loss & Damage Fund at COP28 and scale up new and additional finance for loss and damage.

Scaling up and directing finance to locally led approaches

Global systems, mechanisms, finance and processes to scale up nature-based solutions to climate change must be aligned with, and in service of, grassroots implementation. As a grassroots-focused organisation, committed to working with and for those who live closest to biodiversity and carbon-rich ecosystems, Fauna & Flora calls for a focus on bridging the growing gap between global frameworks and grassroots delivery.

As the Global Stocktake Technical Dialogue Synthesis Report⁵ recognised, the overall climate finance deficit remains vast and there is a risk of significant disconnect between the quality and quantity of this finance and the needs of those whose rights and livelihoods are implicated in delivery of nature-based solutions on the ground. Only about 10% of climate finance²⁵ currently reaches local actors in developing countries, and only a small fraction of international adaptation finance for low-income countries also supports nature.²⁶ We are missing out on significant opportunities to maximise financial support to achieve benefits for local livelihoods, ecosystems and climate.

Furthermore, scaling climate finance cannot mean just re-purposing official development assistance; it needs to be new and additional funding. This was true for only 7% of the climate finance provided from 2011 to 2020 by wealthy countries.²⁷

To ensure the integrity and efficacy of carbon markets, Fauna & Flora calls for urgent completion of remaining details in Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, establishing appropriate guardrails, standards and transparency measures, and building on lessons learned from Voluntary Carbon Market processes, with Indigenous People and local communities as the core beneficiaries. At a time of urgency, where quality, quantity and speed of implementation are increasingly in tension, and where significant commercial interests are at play, we support the principle of 'scaling with care' - building on successful examples of locally led, nature-positive approaches. This will help to ensure that the interests of local actors are not overlooked.

Achieving the desired outcomes for climate and nature depends on actively engaging with stakeholders and rights holders as empowered actors in all stages of the development and implementation of naturebased solutions. This includes engaging effectively with Indigenous People and local communities, women and other marginalised or vulnerable groups, and requires adequate resourcing. Fauna & Flora's experience shows that partnership approaches to support capacity and local leadership are essential for long-term success.

What is the way forward?

 Developed nations must deliver in full their overdue commitment to mobilise USD 100 billion per year (totalling USD 600 billion by 2025) to support climate action in developing countries, primarily using a grant-based mechanism rather than loans. Clarity is vital on what counts as climate finance, and progress must be made on removing barriers to access this finance, particularly for sub-national and local-level actors. Furthermore, the new finance goal starting in 2025 should be set in line with the needs and priorities of developing countries, supported by the reform of the global financial system. Janeh Karte, one of the women participating in Fauna & Flora's recent gender-equality initiatives in Liberia. © Fauna & Flora

- We need to see recognition of the importance of locally led approaches to nature-based mitigation and adaptation action, ensuring Indigenous People and local communities are empowered to participate effectively and benefit equitably. Reference to this in the Global Stocktake would give a strong signal and help to unlock increased public and private investment in projects that take a locally led approach. Likewise, recognition of the value of 'other effective area-based conservation measures' (OECMs), which provide a mechanism to support effective biodiversity conservation and naturebased climate action outside of formal protected areas, would enable greater recognition and participation of, and benefits to, Indigenous People and local communities in the implementation of nature-based solutions at scale.
- There should be a focus on strengthening the governance, integrity and transparency of the voluntary carbon market as a key lever for investment into the protection and restoration of nature via market-wide initiatives. We also need to see the adoption of progressive and fair regulations regarding the voluntary carbon market at country level. The focus on integrity and transparency within the voluntary carbon market must also be applied to activities under Article 6 and the negotiation of sovereign credit transactions, recognising the potential of these to both drive impact and affect the lives of local people, particularly Indigenous People and local communities, at significant scale.
- We need to bridge the gap between the adaptation finance that is currently available and the increasing needs outlined in the Adaptation Gap Report 2023. At COP26 we saw a call to double adaptation finance from 2019 levels by 2025, but even this level still falls far short²⁸ of estimated needs. Contributing countries, multilateral development banks, and multilateral climate funds should raise ambition in terms of the overall amount (committing at least 50% of their climate finance to adaptation), access to, and quality of adaptation finance, including major increases going to least developed countries, small island developing states and other vulnerable states. In the COP28 decision, countries should also agree to develop concrete delivery plans for their adaptation finance pledges.

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We are Fauna & Flora. Together, we can save nature. Please, join us.

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