

# UN nature meeting agrees on land, ocean protection

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Delegates show their exhaustion during the plenary meeting at the U.N. Convention on Biodiversity meeting in Nagoya, Japan, Friday, Oct. 29, 2010. Delegates from more than 190 countries struggled Friday to break a deadlock on setting ambitious goals to preserve animals, plants and ecosystems, raising the prospect that the two-week U.N. meeting might end in failure. (AP Photo/Kyodo News)

(AP) -- Representatives to a U.N. conference on biodiversity agreed early Saturday to expand protected areas on land and at sea in the hopes of slowing the rate of extinction of the world's animals and plants and preventing further damage to its ecosystems.

After marathon negotiations that stretched hours past the designated time, delegates also managed to overcome divisions between rich and poor countries to agree to share access to and the benefits of genetic

resources such as plants whose extracts have been developed into medicines - a key sticking point that had threatened to doom the entire two-week meeting in Nagoya, southwest of Tokyo.

Scientists estimate that the Earth is losing species 100 to 1,000 times the historical average, pushing the planet toward the greatest [extinction](#) age since the dinosaurs were wiped out 65 million years ago. They warn that unless action is taken to prevent [biodiversity](#) loss, extinctions will spike and the intricately interconnected natural world could collapse with devastating consequences, from plunging fish stocks to less access to clean water.

Delegates from 193 countries at the U.N. Convention on Biodiversity agreed to protect 17 percent of the world's land areas and 10 percent of oceans by 2020. Those gains will be difficult to ensure, however, since there is no way to enforce these agreements, and many poor nations lack the funds to manage reserves properly.

Currently, 13 percent of the world's land areas and less than 1 percent of marine areas are protected - which can range from natural parks or marine sanctuaries to areas where there is sustainable fishing or land use.

The series of agreements - which each required a consensus - squeaked through after hours of debate, relieving many delegates who feared the conference would suffer the kind of collapse that befell U.N. [climate talks](#) last year. Participants stood and cheered when it was announced that agreements had been reached in all areas, attendees said.

"We are very glad for this, very happy with the outcome," said Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias, Brazil's Secretary for Biodiversity and Forests. "We had some doubts, but in the end we were confident we would get results."

Some developing countries balked at how to pay for larger protected areas, and delegates agreed to set up a fund from developed nations and other donors by the convention's next meeting in India in 2012, Dias said.

Eager to make the meeting a success, host Japan on Thursday offered \$2 billion to help developing nations reach the goals set by the conference.

Environmental groups welcomed the agreement, but said many of the targets were not bold enough.

"At a certain point in the evening, it looked like it was all going to fall apart, so this is good news," said Nathalie Rey, an oceans policy adviser with Greenpeace International. "I would've liked to have seen more ambitious targets, especially on protected areas."

Japan proposed a compromise text Friday to break a logjam in the prickly area of sharing genetic resources, called access and benefits-sharing, or ABS, in U.N. parlance.

Developing nations and indigenous peoples argue they haven't benefited from the bounty of their resources, such as native plants, that have been developed into drugs by wealthy Western pharmaceutical companies. But in the end, delegates reached an agreement to set up a system that seeks to share these profits and benefits more equitably.

Some 193 governments have joined the biodiversity convention. Only three have not: the United States, Andorra and the Holy See.

**More information:** Nagoya meeting site: <http://www.cbd.int/cop10/>  
Convention on Biological Diversity site: <http://www.cbd.int/>

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