

Nations seek biodiversity accord to stave off mass extinction

February 24 2020, by Laure Fillon



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Nature experts and government delegates gather this week in Rome to thrash out an international deal for endangered species, trying to avoid a

mass extinction event caused by human activity.

Having been hastily relocated from Kunming in China following the coronavirus outbreak, negotiators from more than 140 countries have until February 29 to study a draft text.

The 12-page document, which focuses on goals to be met by mid-century and envisages a stock-take in 2030, should be adopted at the COP15 summit on [biodiversity](#) in October.

The United Nations biodiversity panel IPBES last year warned that up to one million species face the risk of extinction as a result of humanity's insatiable desire for land and materials.

"I cannot underscore enough the importance of making progress at this meeting," said Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, acting executive secretary for the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity.

"The world is eagerly waiting out there for demonstrable progress towards a clear, actionable and transformative global framework on biodiversity."

While the 2015 Paris agreement saw nations commit to cutting [greenhouse gas emissions](#) to stave off the worst threats of climate change, there is no equivalent accord for the world's [endangered species](#).

The IPBES report highlighted the threats posed to nature from [human activity](#), saying that three-quarters of all land and two-thirds of oceans have already been severely affected by mankind.

The report also demonstrated how the depletion of nature will in turn harm humanity.

"This degradation of nature is unprecedented in the history of mankind," said IPBES executive secretary Anne Larigauderie.

'Good first step'

2020 is a crucial year for nature, with the global congress of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature set for Marseille in June and the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow in November.

Negotiators in Rome are focusing on ways to reduce threats to biodiversity, including officially protecting at least 30 percent of land and marine areas and a 50 percent cut in pollution from fertilisers.

It also calls for stricter regulation on plastic pollution and acknowledges the role that the preservation of nature can play in the battle against climate change.

While Louisa Carron, who works for Greenpeace, told AFP the draft was a "good first step", Lin Li of WWF International said she had "mixed feelings".

"The zero draft has not address the drivers of biodiversity at all, for example the consumption/production that really causes causing the loss of nature," said Lin.

Li Shuo, who works on biodiversity issues for Greenpeace, was guarded about the prospects of success in Rome.

"Simply having a 'vision' does not guarantee its fulfilment," he told AFP.

Experts fear progress could be stalled if the plan is to phase out damaging environmental practices on a nation-by-nation basis in roughly the same way as the emissions cuts in the Paris accord.

With the COP15 still set to take place in Kunming, the Rome talks are likely to play a large role in how effective a global deal on biodiversity will be.

"We do not expect a failure," said Mrema.

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