

Tropical forests 'on the edge'

2 September 2015



Dawn over tropical rainforest, Northern Malaysia. Credit: Edward Parker

Tropical rainforests could largely disappear by the end of the century, warns a new report commissioned by the Club of Rome.

The Club of Rome, celebrated for its influential early 1970s report on *The Limits to Growth*, commissioned former WWF International Director-General Dr Claude Martin to write *On the Edge: The State and Fate of the World's Tropical Rainforests*.

The report finds that tropical rainforests, currently covering an area about the size of Australia spread across around 70 countries, could be dramatically reduced in size and planetary significance by "the fatal interactions" between deforestation, [forest fragmentation](#) and climate change.

This would have devastating impacts on biodiversity, indigenous populations and the world's ability to adapt to and avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

Martin's search for "the unvarnished truth" about why we are losing [tropical forests](#) has been acclaimed by many of the significant figures in conservation. Edward O. Wilson called the book "the definitive assessment of the single most important factor in the future of Earth's biodiversity", while Club of Rome Vice President

and former IUCN head Ashok Khosla said it was "just in time".

"Of all invasive species, none has been more destructive than us." noted David Suzuki. "Martin provides us with a description of the catastrophic effects of human activity and a description of some of the possible avenues away from this destructive path."

Martin himself said "I am not a fatalist and I abhor statements that pretend all is lost – they are wrong.

"But without concerted action, we may indeed lose it all. What we should never forget is that we humans are also part of our world's biodiversity, and the security of our descendants will not be independent from it."

The realist in Martin also acknowledges that "there is no silver bullet to solve global environmental problems in a time of a globalized economy and weak governance systems".

"Tropical rainforest conservation, the preservation of the world's biodiversity and [climate change mitigation](#) are intrinsically linked and no single measure, tool or policy will fix this fatal conundrum," he said.

Some of the measures necessary to save the world's tropical rainforests are entirely what you would expect - extend the protection of intact forests, prevent deforestation and fragmentation of forest and engage in reforestation, prevent illegal logging and make legal logging sustainable .

But others are less expected, if no less crucial. It is necessary for instance to protect the cultures and rights of indigenous peoples, engage with all stakeholders, reduce urban food waste, improve agricultural productivity and tackled corruption and poor governance.

And then there are the urgent, overarching agendas that impact much more widely than tropics

or forests. Preventing catastrophic [climate change](#).
Matching consumption to the earth's ability to
provide.

"This is not the pick and choose menu," said
Martin. "I think most of it will need to be
implemented."

Provided by WWF

APA citation: Tropical forests 'on the edge' (2015, September 2) retrieved 18 October 2019 from
<https://phys.org/news/2015-09-tropical-forests-edge.html>

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