

# State of Biodiversity

## in Asia and the Pacific

### I. Background

1. The year 2010 marks the International Year of Biodiversity, which is a celebration of life on Earth and of the value of biodiversity for our lives. The International Year of Biodiversity also represents what may be viewed as a global deadline for halting the loss of biodiversity, set in April 2002 at the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. At that meeting parties adopted a strategic plan, including the target of achieving by 2010 a significant reduction in the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national levels as a contribution to poverty alleviation and for the benefit of all life on Earth. Thus the 2010 biodiversity target was subsequently endorsed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002, and by the United Nations General Assembly, and was incorporated as a new target under the Millennium Development Goals.
2. The rapidly changing state of biodiversity has been chronicled in the third edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO-3), in order to assess progress towards the attainment of the 2010 target and to consider future action. On the basis of the information available to date and analysed for GBO-3, a common message emerges: biodiversity is in decline globally, in most regions, and in most of its forms. Most Governments missed their 2010 target and stated their view that assessing each country's progress towards achieving the biodiversity target had posed a challenging task in the absence of nationally agreed baselines, targets and indicators.

### II. Introduction to Asia and the Pacific

3. Asia and the Pacific encompasses some of the world's greatest biological, cultural and economic diversity. It covers 8.6 per cent of the Earth's total surface area and nearly 30 per cent of its land area. It is also host to certain wildlife species unique to the region such as the giant panda, the tiger, the Asian elephant, the Javan

rhinoceros and the orang-utan. The region's wealth in biological diversity and associated traditional knowledge is evidenced by the fact that 5 of the 17 members of the group known as the Like-minded Megadiverse Countries are from this region: China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.

4. This region is also home to approximately 4 billion people, representing some 60 per cent of the world's population. They live in communities ranging from large urban centres to remote rural communities, and together speak more than 2,000 languages. The collective economic activity of the region – significantly boosted by current rapid growth in China and India – accounts for about a quarter of the global domestic product.
5. The vast scale of human activities in this region means that it poses a direct challenge to the resilience of the regional ecosystem. The serious effects of these activities are already evident today: rapid economic development in this region has led to massive changes in lifestyle and increases in correlated indirect drivers of biodiversity loss. As a result, nature has come under great pressure and much valuable biodiversity has been lost or continues to be degraded.

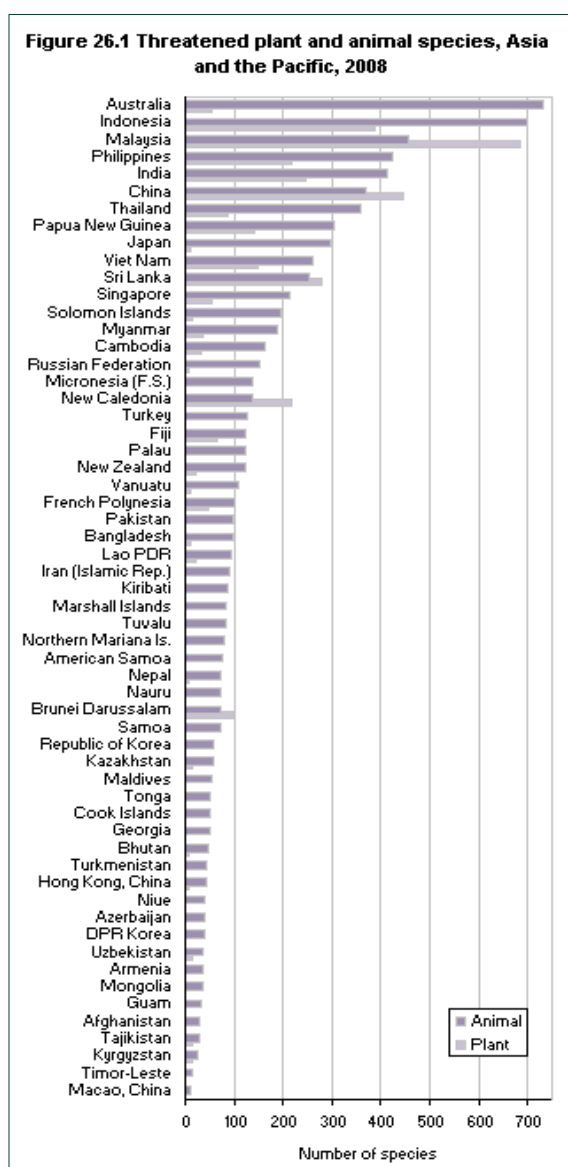


Figure I. Threatened plant and animal species, Asia and the Pacific, 2008

(Statistics Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific)

### III. Key biodiversity challenges in Asia and the Pacific

6. In 2008 Asia and the Pacific recorded the world's highest number of threatened species. Many of the most serious problems are to be found in South-East Asia, where 6 of the 10 countries in the region with the highest numbers of threatened animal and plant species (figure 1) are to be found. Over the period 2002-2009, nearly 2,500 species in Asia and the Pacific were recorded in the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) as "critically endangered", "endangered" or "vulnerable". In all, 13 of the 34 biodiversity hotspots designated by Conservation International are also to be found in this area (East Melanesian Islands, Himalayas, Indo-Burma, Japan, mountains of south-west China, New Caledonia, New Zealand,

Philippines, Polynesia-Micronesia, south-west Australia, Sundaland, Wallacea, Western Ghats and Sri Lanka). In particular, bird species have faced an especially steep increase in extinction risk in South-East Asia and on the Pacific islands, while mammals have suffered the steepest increase in risk in South and South-East Asia compared to the global average.

7. Where plant species are concerned, medicinal plants face a high risk of extinction in Asia and the Pacific, where there is continuing dependence on wild collection. The region has seen a net overall gain of forests over the period 2000–2009, but high rates of fragmentation and net loss of forests have continued in many countries in South and South-East Asia. Over the period 2000–2005, the rates of loss of primary forests were fastest in Cambodia, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Indonesia, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea and Viet Nam, accounting for a quarter of the world’s total losses over that period (Statistics Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific). In particular, the rapid increase in the large-scale plantation of oil palms for biofuel processing in some countries, particularly in areas previously covered by primary tropical forest, is a major factor in biodiversity loss, causing both land degradation and habitat loss for many bird species.
8. Turning to coastal ecosystems, Asia and the Pacific contains a large proportion of the world’s remaining mangrove forests and coral reefs; both systems continue, however, to suffer from various direct and indirect pressures. Mangroves are notably, although not exclusively, affected by shrimp farming and other forms of mariculture: this is a matter of particular concern since this is the only region in the world in which the rate of loss of mangrove forests has not slowed in recent years. Meanwhile, the region’s coral reef system, which includes the world’s two largest coral

formations (the Great Barrier Reef and the New Caledonia Barrier Reef) and has the highest level of coral diversity in the world, has seen its extent of coral cover decline from 40 per cent in the early 1980s to approximately 20 per cent by 2003, partly owing to global-scale stressors such as climate change.

9. While an increasing proportion of the world’s surface has been designated as protected areas (figure II), progress in this regard in Asia and the Pacific appears relatively modest, particularly considering the large number of threatened species in this region. The terrestrial area designated as legally protected constitutes less than 9 per cent of the total surface area, below the global average (figure II). Within the region, East and North-East Asia has the highest proportion of protected areas, while North and Central Asia has the lowest. Where marine protected areas are concerned, the area designated as legally protected in 2007 constituted less than 5 per cent of the region’s territorial waters (figure III).

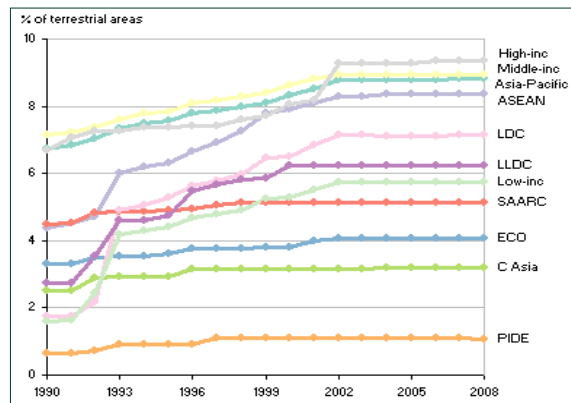


Figure II. Ratio of protected terrestrial areas to surface area, 1990–2008 (Statistics Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the

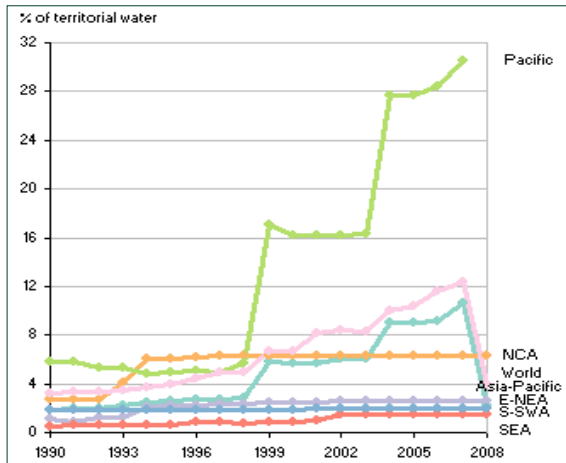


Figure III. Ratio of protected marine areas to territorial water, 1990–2008  
(Statistics Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific)

#### IV. Regional efforts to achieve the biodiversity targets set for 2010 and beyond

10. While the countries failed to achieve the 2010 biodiversity targets and the prospects for biodiversity in Asia and the Pacific remain shaky, some encouraging signs of progress have also been observed. Thus, 87 per cent of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity have developed national biodiversity strategies and action plans, and such strategies and action plans are currently under development in most of the remaining countries. Almost half of these have been developed or updated since 2002, demonstrating a significant increase in the willingness manifested by these countries to protect their biodiversity since the 2010 targets were established.
11. The region's commitment is evident in other indicators as well. Since 2002, 739 additional sites were added to the list of what are known as "Ramsar sites" under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, Especially as Waterfowl Habitat, 143 of which were from Asia and the Pacific (table 1). This reflects Governments' increased concern about the ecological condition of wetland sites of international importance.
12. Important steps have also been taken to ensure that critical ecosystems in the region are protected. For example, in 2008 Kiribati established the Phoenix Islands Protected Area, which covers over 400,000 square kilometres, making it the world's largest protected area. The area contains globally important coral ecosystems and deep-sea habitats; under the protection regime commercial fishing is prohibited, while subsistence fishing and sustainable use are permitted. Another noteworthy achievement is the 10-year action plan agreed upon in 2009 by Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste, to implement the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security. This covers 6 million square kilometres of ocean and will support marine-based industries and livelihoods necessary for food security while ensuring the conservation of the area.
13. At a recent regional consultation, Governments reported on initiatives that would help steer a way forward for Asia and the Pacific. For example, the Asia-Pacific Biodiversity Observation Network and the recently launched East and South-East Asia Biodiversity Information Initiative are designed to establish biodiversity information networks at the regional level to support planning and decision-making in the area of taxonomy. There are also many examples of traditional, community-based ecosystem management systems that are enjoying increased attention in the region, including Japan's Satoyama landscape concept and the locally managed marine areas in the South Pacific (see boxes 6 and 11 of the GBO-3 full report), which can be developed to demonstrate good practice for the planned intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services and to boost global biodiversity governance and efforts to mainstream biodiversity.

14. To establish a new strategic plan for the post-2010 era, countries in Asia and the Pacific have agreed on the need, at the outset, to undertake a thorough evaluation of current successes and failures. Accordingly, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Biodiversity Centre is undertaking a regional assessment of progress towards the 2010 target, which will be launched during the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2010. The revision, updating and implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans would be necessary to translate any new strategic plan into clear national commitments. Countries must set minimum quantitative targets and allocate adequate domestic funds to meet these targets, in addition to international funding. There is also a need to strengthen monitoring and evaluation functions, including the development of national indicators and the establishment of baselines. Other specific inputs from the region for the post-2010 targets can be found in the text box below.

**Table 1**  
**Wetland sites of international importance designated by the Ramsar Convention, added on or after 2002 (data: Ramsar Convention)**

Country	Number of sites added on or after 2002
Australia	8
China	30
Fiji	1
India	19
Indonesia	1
Japan	26
Kazakhstan	6
Kyrgyzstan	2
Malaysia	5
Marshall Islands	1
Mongolia	5
Myanmar	1
Nepal	8
New Zealand	1
Pakistan	3
Palau	1
Republic of Korea	11
Samoa	1
Sri Lanka	1
Thailand	6
Turkey	4
Turkmenistan	1
Viet Nam	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>143</b>



## RECOMMENDATIONS ON DEVELOPMENT OF THE UPDATED STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE CONVENTION FOR THE POST-2010 PERIOD

From the Regional Consultation for East, South and South-East Asia on updating the strategic plan of the Convention on Biological Diversity for post-2010 period (15&#8211;18 December 2009, Tokyo)

### Overall suggestions for the new Strategic Plan

- (a) It is important to analyse why countries failed to achieve the 2010 target while elaborating the possible vision, mission, strategic goals, targets and support mechanisms for the post-2010 period;
- (b) The global strategy should be broad and provide a framework to allow regions and countries to develop goals and targets to address priority issues they face, taking into consideration national situation of countries in different development stages;
- (c) Strategic goals and headline targets for the post-2010 period should be well defined for implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation;
- (d) Goals should be really strategic and targets should be really SMART;
- (e) Interim targets and milestones should be developed to ensure that momentum will not be lost for achieving strategic goals;
- (f) Goals and targets should embrace all components of biodiversity and address drivers, both direct and indirect, of biodiversity loss, and obstacles to implementation;
- (g) It is important to recognize the value of biodiversity and associated traditional knowledge and benefits of conservation for human well-being and link biodiversity conservation with poverty reduction, sustainable development and ecosystem management;
- (h) The Strategic Plan should address the three objectives of the Convention in a balanced manner, with adequate focus given to ABS-related issues;
- (i) Inputs should be drawn from the development of strategies of other related conventions such as UNCCD and the Strategic Plans for the Convention and the Biosafety Protocol should be complementary;

### Specific suggestions for the Strategic Plan

- (j) Capacity constraints for implementation should be identified as one major issue that should be addressed by the new Strategic Plan;
- (k) Mission should be simple and focused;
- (l) Strategic goals should be simple and direct and overlaps among them should be avoided;
- (m) Headline targets need further elaboration to ensure that they are clear enough to achieve strategic goals and easy for monitoring and evaluation;
- (n) Support mechanisms proposed are weak and need further elaboration. Some mechanisms such as adequate funding, technology transfer, regional cooperation and support to monitoring should be added;

### Suggestions for the implementation of the new Strategic Plan

- (o) Communication and outreach to all relevant stakeholders should be a crucial priority for the implementation of the new Strategic Plan;
- (p) Mechanisms to support implementation should be an integral part of the updated Strategic Plan;
- (q) Ownership of post-2010 target(s) by stakeholders is crucial for future implementation;
- (r) It is important to develop indicators and baselines for monitoring and reporting;
- (s) Global targets need to be translated into national commitments including through updating national biodiversity strategies and action plans in light of the new Strategic Plan
- (t) A programme of capacity-building will be needed to support implementation of the new Strategic Plan, including regional and sub-regional workshops to facilitate the translation of the new Strategic Plan into updated national biodiversity strategies and action plans, and a strengthened clearing house mechanism to facilitate the exchange of relevant information, expertise and experience among and within countries.





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