

Cop15 negotiators close to agreeing nature deal as talks draw to end

Final agreement could bring better protection for vital ecosystems and big reforms to agriculture



China's environment minister, Huang Runqiu, the Cop15 president, said he wanted the final text of the agreement to be adopted on Monday. Photograph: Christinne Muschi/Reuters

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A potentially **transformational agreement for nature is close** to being reached at Cop15 in Montreal, which could bring better protection for Earth's vital ecosystems such as the Amazon and Congo basin rainforests, big reforms to agriculture and better protection of indigenous territories and rights.

After four years of negotiations and 12 years since the last biodiversity targets were agreed in Japan, the Chinese president of **Cop15** put forward its

recommendations for a final agreement after two weeks of intense negotiations at the UN biodiversity summit in Canada.

Over the last few days, the French president, **Emmanuel Macron**, the British prime minister, Rishi Sunak, and other world leaders called for an ambitious package to tackle scientific warnings about 1m species at risk of extinction ahead of the release of the text.

Heads of delegations will respond to the text in a meeting later on Sunday, with a plenary expected to be held in the evening and negotiations set to continue overnight. China's environment minister, Huang Runqiu, the Cop15 president, said he wanted the final text to be adopted on Monday.

The package, which includes this decade's targets to halt the destruction of the planet's life-sustaining ecosystems, includes plans to protect 30% of Earth for nature, reform \$500bn (£412bn) of environmentally damaging subsidies and halt pollution that damages ecosystems by the end of the decade. Countries from the global north would contribute \$30bn a year for conservation by the end of the decade if the agreement is adopted.

Strong language for the protection of indigenous rights and territories is emphasised throughout the 23 targets and four goals that make up the main agreement, known as the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Plans to create a fund for biodiversity to support the new conservation efforts, housed under the UN's Global Environment Facility, are included in the package presented by the Chinese presidency. A new fund was a key demand from developing countries in the agreement following walkouts of talks earlier in the week.

Environmental groups and observers said that if the deal was implemented in full and backed by financial resources, it could be the start of a major change in humanity's relationship with nature.

But they cautioned that no previous UN biodiversity targets have been met by governments. Some expressed disappointment at the weaker-than-hoped language on consumption and business action on nature after a proposal for mandatory disclosures was not included in the text, and the term "nature

positive”, which scientists had said would be the biodiversity equivalent of “net zero”, did not appear.

“We’re almost there,” said Canada’s environment minister, Steven Guilbeault, who has played a key role at Cop15 in shaping negotiations. “[It is] a text that is genuinely trying to chart a middle-of-the-way course ... Many elements are there. If adopted, it will represent a massive change,” said one observer close to the talks.

“We’re now only a degree or two removed from a deal that could catalyse global nature protection,” said Li Shuo, a policy adviser for Greenpeace China, who has been following the negotiations closely. “The shell of global biodiversity protections is here. But we have two days to fill it with specific figures to hold governments to account.”

Noelle Kumpel, the head of policy at Birdlife International, said the draft has a clear mission to halt and reduce the loss of biodiversity by 2030 but that “the rest of the framework currently fails to set a clear roadmap to how we will achieve this”.

Eva Zabey, the executive director of Business for Nature, said the latest text signalled to large businesses they would be required to assess and disclose their impact on nature but it should be stronger. “Voluntary action is not enough,” she said. The target of making businesses halve their negative impacts on biodiversity has also been removed.

Another contentious issue was the inclusion of “nature positive”, which many scientists said was important to get into the final text as a signal of the sort of ambition that should be agreed. “Although the 2030 goal of ‘take urgent action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss’ is weaker than ‘to halt and reverse’, this is still a strong call to action,” said the Oxford biology professor EJ Milner-Gulland.

“I think the main issue is that the can is being kicked down the road as we are lacking clear targets and milestones for many of the most important things.”

However, she said it was good to see concrete figures on the finance side. “I also just hope that we get some kind of deal that we can work with, even if it’s imperfect – every deal is a compromise,” she said.

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Ministers thrash out deal at landmark U.N. nature talks

By Gloria Dickie
and Isla Binnie



People take part in a march during COP15, the two-week U.N. Biodiversity summit in Montreal, Quebec, Canada December 10, 2022. REUTERS/Christinne Muschi/File Photo

MONTREAL, Dec 18 (Reuters) - Negotiators at a U.N. summit to protect nature were closing in on a new global deal on Sunday that could see 30% of land and sea protected by 2030, with hundreds of billions of dollars directed toward conserving the world's wild places and species.

China, the president of the COP15 conference in Montreal, released a proposed text on Sunday morning that ministers welcomed, with some reservations.

"Another potential round of work needs to be done so we can align the resources and the ambition," said Colombia Environment Minister Susana Muhamad. "But I'm very optimistic that, as the main goals have been landed and there is no, in general, opposition to these goals, we have made a very important step forward."

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Policymakers hope an ambitious deal can spur nature conservation the same way that an international pact in Paris in 2015 helped mobilize efforts to limit planet-warming carbon emissions.

The draft, based on the last two weeks of talks, sets a crucial financial target of \$200 billion per year for conservation initiatives, though demands less from wealthy countries than some developing states had wanted.

It lays out support for protecting 30% of land and waters by 2030, a landmark goal informally known as 30-by-30, and suggests restoring 30% of degraded lands.

"We were surprised that (the text) is actually capturing most of the things we want to go for," a negotiator from a European country told Reuters. On restoration, he noted that the text went with a more ambitious target of 30%, instead of 20%, which "is really good and ambitious and necessary."

Businesses should also be asked to assess and disclose how they affect and are affected by nature loss, but the current document does not make such reporting mandatory.

EU Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevicius told reporters during a break that negotiators were "on the right track to finalise" a deal but highlighted shortcomings on numerical targets and expressed concern about an increase in funding from developed countries.

Ministers from nearly 200 governments need to come to a consensus on 23 proposed targets by midnight on Monday (0500 GMT Tuesday).

DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

While optimistic, environmental campaigners worry the technical wording of the 30-by-30 target might not adequately address ocean conservation.

The target mentions protecting at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine areas.

However, it does not clarify whether this means 30% of land and separately 30% of oceans, said Brian O'Donnell, director of the non-profit Campaign for Nature, adding China needs to quickly clarify its intent.

"The target should split land and sea to make sure 30% applies to them respectively," said Li Shuo, global policy adviser at Greenpeace East Asia.

MOBILIZING MONEY

The draft recommends allocating \$200 billion per year from all sources, including the public and private sectors, for conservation initiatives - a target seen as critical for the successful implementation of any deal.

Developing countries were pushing for half of that - \$100 billion per year - to flow from wealthy

countries to poorer nations. However, the text mentions only that \$20 billion to \$30 billion per year comes from developed countries by 2030.

"Probably we will have to reach an agreement between \$30 billion and \$100 billion," Colombia's Muhamad told reporters.

The draft also notes that the money could come voluntarily from any country - a nod to developed nations' desire that countries with large economies, such as China, also contribute funds.

Having China and Arab countries joining would be "a huge step forward," Sinkevicius said.

Asked whether China should be considered a developing country, as still defined by the World Bank, he said, "I think we should not stick to 1992 descriptions but see the reality on the ground, and it's very different from 1992."

One of the greatest points of contention among delegates has been whether a new fund should be

established for that money, improving on an existing structure. On Wednesday morning, developing country negotiators walked out of a financing meeting in protest. The draft deal does not mention setting up a separate facility.

The text suggests harmful subsidies should be reduced by at least \$500 billion per year by the decade's end but does not specify whether they should be eliminated, phased out or reformed.

Other proposals include directing policymakers to "encourage and enable" businesses to monitor, assess and disclose how they affect and are affected by biodiversity, but not making these processes mandatory.

Tony Goldner, who heads a group working on a framework for companies to manage and disclose economic risks related to nature, said a number of countries and financial firms would move toward mandatory disclosure anyway.

"At an institutional level, the train has left the station in any case because financial institutions are increasingly aware that nature risk is sitting on their balance sheets."

Cop15 brokers talk up hopes for nature deal as conference enters final stretch

Agreement will need to strike consensus over sources and mechanisms to fund conservation



The Cop15 president, Huang Runqiu, will release a text of the final agreement after listening to statements from countries. Photograph: Lars Hagberg/AFP/Getty Images

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Sun 18 Dec 2022 07.00 GMT

The French president, **Emmanuel Macron**, has called on countries to “go big” in negotiations at Cop15, as the talks to secure the next decade of targets to stop the destruction of nature reach the final stages.

“The most vulnerable countries are home to biodiversity treasures. We need to increase our funding to support them, with no expense spared! France will double its funding to 1 billion euros per year. COP 15 stakeholders: get on board and join the fight!” he tweeted.

The **Cop15** president, Huang Runqiu, said he would release a text of the final agreement, known as the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, at 8am Montreal time (1pm UK time) on Sunday, after listening to statements from countries. Another meeting with heads of delegations will then be held later in the day, seemingly after the World Cup final between France and Argentina.

“I feel quite exhausted because this meeting has been going on and on like a marathon, but we are going to see the finishing line soon,” Runqiu said, adding that every minister had been able to discuss policies, and all had made an effort, and supported China. “I hope everyone will come to a consensus which everyone will be able to accept,” he said.

Canada’s environment minister, Steven Guilbeault, said he was on the ground asking countries for “collaboration, compromise and consensus”. He said he was confident an ambitious framework would be agreed. “We have the power to change the course of history for the better,” he said. “Let’s give nature the Paris moment it deserves.”

The creation of a new fund for Earth’s biodiversity appeared on Saturday to be the key dividing line between countries.

In echoes of the division over forming a loss and damage fund at Cop27 in Egypt last month, a group of developing nations are calling for the creation of a new financing mechanism for the conservation of key ecosystems.

Countries from the global north, including the UK, EU member states and Cop15 co-hosts Canada, are calling for ambitious targets on conservation in the final text, including large-scale restoration of nature, protecting 30% of land

and sea, and tackling the drivers of wildlife loss such as pesticide use and harmful subsidies.

But several countries from the global south, including Indonesia, Brazil and the Democratic Republic of Congo, argue that the new conservation targets must be backed by more funding, which they say must be accompanied by the formation of a new biodiversity fund that is separate to the main funding mechanism, the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The **group walked out of talks** on Wednesday over the issue.

On Saturday, several government ministers said a decision must be taken on the creation of the new biodiversity fund at Cop15, which is scheduled to conclude on Monday.

Virginijus Sinkevičius, the EU commissioner for the environment, had **ruled out the creation of a new biodiversity fund** as part of the final agreement earlier in the week, but on Friday he said he was open to proposals but the donor base should expand to include countries that have become wealthy in the last 30 years.

“We are the largest funder for biodiversity by far. Others who are earning billions out of the crisis in Europe, if they would at least match the amounts that member states have put in it could mean a major breakthrough,” he said. “It would be great that they [China and Brazil] would play some sort of role. We also have to be clear about the Arab countries. Some of them have really, really achieved completely economic different levels since the agreements were written.”

China, Brazil, India, Mexico and Indonesia are the top five historical recipients from the GEF, and are to feature in the top five for the **next \$5.3bn (£4.3bn) funding cycle from 2022 to 2026**. Many biodiverse nations from Africa, Asia and Latin America argue that they should get more money to pay for conservation.

France had been accused of being a blocker of the new fund by some developing countries, but the minister for ecological transition, Christophe Béchu, told the Guardian on Saturday that this was “fake news”.

“The position of France since January 2021 is to say biodiversity needs money and we have been the first country in the world doubling our commitments for biodiversity. Currently, the question is not about the principle [of creating a new fund] but about some mechanism. And we are not blocking any process,” he said.

Li Shuo, a policy adviser for Greenpeace China who has been following the talks in Montreal, said: “The package will only be unveiled tomorrow, but so far the presidency has followed a process that has kept everybody comfortable. They now need to come up with a package that drives ambition upward for both finance and conservation targets.”