

## **RES 65.1 Recognising the severity of the climate change threat and the response imperatives**

### **Background**

The [World Association of Zoos and Aquariums](#) (WAZA) represents a community of over 300 member institutions with a mandate of wildlife [conservation](#), scientific [research](#) and [environmental education](#) of 700 million annual visitors. This position statement is necessitated by these responsibilities and an appreciation of the threat to the natural environment, to species and to current and future generations of humanity.

WAZA recognises the severe threat of human-induced climate change to life on Earth. The risk is so great because CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have already exceeded the planetary boundaries necessary for biodiversity and humanity alike and these urgently need returning to safe levels while it is still possible to do so. Climate change has been addressed principally by RES 49.1 at the 49th Annual Conference held in Sao Paulo, 1994, by RES 61.4 at the 61<sup>st</sup> Annual WAZA Conference, held in Leipzig, 2006 and the pre COP-15 communication to world leaders, via UN Secretary General in December 2009.

### **The 65<sup>th</sup> WAZA Annual Conference**

RECOGNISING that the best available science supports the conclusion that there is an urgent need to restore Earth's energy balance by returning atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels to below 350 parts per million (ppm).

BEING AWARE that fossil fuel usage, habitat destruction and agricultural practices have increased CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations from their pre-industrial level of 280ppm to around 390ppm and are increasing by 2ppm a year.

CONCERNED that if we fail to return CO<sub>2</sub> levels to below 350ppm the processes of environmental change, including sea ice, ice-sheet and mountain glacier disintegration, sea level rise, methane hydrate releases, ocean acidification, shifting climate zones, extreme weather events and biodiversity loss will pass beyond humanity's control.

BEING FURTHER AWARE THAT because the full impacts of current CO<sub>2</sub> levels will take several decades to become evident, due to climate system inertia, it is understandably difficult to appreciate the danger that CO<sub>2</sub> levels above 350ppm constitutes. Risk perceptions are further compromised by widespread understating of the dangers we are facing.

### **THE WORLD ASSOCIATION OF ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS**

URGES the international community to agree to take effective action to return atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations to below 350ppm while it is still possible to do so.

AGREES that of crucial importance to achieving this goal is an urgent phase-out of coal emissions by 2030, reversing the destruction of natural habitats and reversing the net negative impact of agricultural practices. These actions are also essential for helping humanity and wildlife contend with the many unavoidable impacts of climate change.

CONCLUDES that WAZA institutions recognise the urgency of, and commit to reducing their carbon footprint and addressing climate change issues through their business practices, institutional culture, conservation and research programmes. WAZA institutions also recognise the urgency of conveying the threat issues and response imperatives highlighted in this resolution through their education and training programmes and community engagement initiatives.

## Supporting references:

WAZA petition statement to world leaders via UN Secretary General November 2009 [www.WAZA.org](http://www.WAZA.org)

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Hansen J. *et al* (2005) Earth's Energy Imbalance: Confirmation and Implications. *Science* **308**: no. 5727, pp. 1431 – 1435 <http://www.sciencemag.org/www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/abstract/308/5727/1431>

National Academy of Sciences (2010) *Climate Stabilization Targets: Emissions, Concentrations and Impacts over Decades to Millennia*. [www.nap.edu/catalog/12877.html](http://www.nap.edu/catalog/12877.html)

Veron J.E.N. *et al* (2009) *The coral reef crisis: The critical importance of <350ppm CO<sub>2</sub>*. *Marine Pollution Bulletin* **58**: 1428 – 1436. [http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/L01\\_402.cws\\_home/mpb\\_featured](http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/L01_402.cws_home/mpb_featured)

Trumper K. *et al* (2009), *The Natural Fix? The role of ecosystems in climate mitigation*. A UNEP rapid response assessment. United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge, UK. [http://www.unep.org/publications/search/pub\\_details\\_s.asp?ID=4027](http://www.unep.org/publications/search/pub_details_s.asp?ID=4027)

ZSL Indicators and Assessments Unit and WAZA/CBSG Climate Change Task Force (2010) *Reference list of CO<sub>2</sub> threshold levels and associated climate change impact and response issues: An iterative Web-based review*. [www.bioclimate.org](http://www.bioclimate.org)