



CONSERVATION ASIA 2016

DECLARATION ON Responsible Business in Asia

BACKGROUND

Asia's rapid economic development has dramatically transformed its environment. Large areas of terrestrial forests, mangrove and peatswamp forests have been logged and converted into commercial land uses such as shrimp farming and agroindustrial plantations. Resource extraction and associated management practices (such as forest burning) can impose substantial costs to human health and the environment, severely reduce wildlife populations, and reduce the value of ecosystem services provided.

Sound economic growth can be achieved alongside the formulation, promotion and adoption of environmentally sound business practices. Science-based environmental stewardship through prescient decision making can ensure long-term benefits for both people and the environment.

Many large corporations have made laudable strides towards improved environmental stewardship, through mechanisms such as no-deforestation policies and Corporate Social Responsibility portfolios. Large companies can be leaders of change because of their visibility and influence. However in many industries—for example, rubber, oil palm, and mining—a significant proportion of the sector is comprised of small-holders. Efforts can be made to ensure that regulatory or market-based incentives for sustainable practice—and disincentives for destructive ones—be applied to small-scale actors as well.

Multi-stakeholder initiatives such as the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil actively encourage—with increasing success—the recognition of biodiversity and implementation of conservation set-asides. Stakeholders across society—consumers, researchers, governments and corporations—have also contributed to the profound changes emerging under the umbrella of “Responsible Business Practices”.

Asia-Pacific countries have made a commitment to the United Nation's Sustainability Goals. In keeping with this, Governments in the region therefore have a leadership role to play in promoting responsible business practices in Southeast Asia. Governments play an important role in environmental governance in the Asia region through multiple mechanisms (regulatory, legislative and financial). It is important to ensure that the environmental degradation caused by the economic investment by companies in the region and their operations is, whenever possible, avoided or, if not possible, minimised to an acceptable level. While regulatory action has been influential in reforming unsustainable practices and will continue to be important, punitive regulations tend to be the norm; however they are not the only method of encouraging improved environmental stewardship. Positive rewards, both tangible and intangible, could further incentivize business practice in many sectors.

We, the 600 participants 37 countries who attended the Conservation Asia 2016 conference held from 29 June – 2 July 2016, organized under the theme *Sustainable landscapes for people, business and biodiversity*, a joint meeting of the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ATBC) and the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) Asia Section;

RECOMMEND THAT

- Science-based mechanisms be developed to standardise protocols in the approval of new developments;
- Independent scientific research is integrated into all aspects of business practice that may affect the environment;
- Positive incentives are created to reward responsible businesses that can demonstrate best practices in environmental sustainability;
- Responsible consumption is facilitated through education and awareness, and dissemination of transparent, science-based product information to the public.

2 July, 2016