



Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation

THE BONITO DECLARATION

Urgent Need For Continued Improvements In Environmental Conservation And Sustainable Development In Brazil

At the same time as it hosts the United Nations Earth Summit, Rio+20, Brazil is also hosting the largest ever gathering of tropical biologists. Brazil's success in advancing science and conservation, while achieving impressive economic growth and significant improvements in human welfare are being watched by the world as a potential model for environmentally sustainable development.

Brazil's international leadership is reflected in its significant investment in science and education, development of sophisticated and transparent systems for monitoring forest cover in the Amazon region, increased involvement of Indigenous Peoples in decision-making over their own lands and resources, and the expanded network of conservation areas and officially designated indigenous lands. These and other policies have led to dramatic reductions in deforestation rates in the Brazilian Amazon.

Whilst significant progress has been made, it is critical that momentum be maintained to halt the loss and degradation of Brazil's globally unique ecosystems.

Therefore, the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ATBC), the world's largest organisation dedicated to the study and conservation of tropical ecosystems, bringing together at the 2012 annual meeting 607 Brazilian and 604 international scientists representing 48 nations, RESOLVED TO:

URGE INCREASED EFFORTS to protect Brazil's ecosystems from ongoing loss and degradation.

Continued reductions in deforestation and improved protection of the Amazon forest remain an urgent priority. Even where habitat clearance has declined or stopped, the synergistic impacts of unsustainable logging, unplanned agriculture, uncontrolled fires, road expansion, and extreme droughts threaten the integrity of even large areas of remaining forest.

Outside of the legal Amazon, many of Brazil's globally important ecosystems, including the Atlantic forest, cerrado, caatinga, pantanal, and pampas grasslands, as well as freshwater and marine systems, have been neglected, and have inadequate legal protection. There is a need to expand on initial land use mapping efforts in these systems to establish regular transparent monitoring efforts and make available to the public and scientists information on the loss of these ecosystems.

CALL FOR RENEWED AND CAREFUL CONSIDERATION of the impact of three new environmental policy developments:

The building of dams on tropical rivers, including the Belo Monte project and the new proposal for dams on the Tapajós River, will have severe impacts on aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, and on the people that depend on them. Dams will also significantly increase greenhouse gas emissions at a time when efforts to curb global warming are reaching a critical juncture.

We urge investigation of and investment in less environmentally damaging forms of development and technology that meet growing energy needs while avoiding the major social and environmental impacts of large dam projects. We further urge an increase in the rigor and transparency with which scientific information is considered and utilized in the planning of all dam projects.

The demarcation and implementation of Conservation Units and Indigenous Lands would be threatened by changes in the effective process by which lands are planned and formally agreed. Lack of formal recognition and demarcation of Indigenous lands endangers both indigenous livelihoods and the provision of critical ecosystem services.

We urge careful consideration of the ultimate impacts on human wellbeing, biodiversity conservation and the provision of environmental services of any proposed legislative changes relating to protected areas.

Proposed changes to the Forest Code, if enacted, would lead to a further loss of forest and biodiversity.

We urge a reconsideration of the changes to the Code.

Each of these proposed changes to legislation imperils the international standing of Brazil as a global leader in environmental protection.

CALL FOR MORE EFFECTIVE USE of the wealth of scientific capacity and resources available in Brazil to develop evidence-based policy.

Brazil has shown both vision and leadership in investing in higher education and research, and now boasts world-class institutes and scientists in many areas of scientific endeavour. Experience in the Amazon of investing in remote sensing technologies and making data publically available has been central to setting and meeting of targets for reducing deforestation.

We urge that the same vision is extended to other ecosystems to ensure long-term environmentally sustainable stewardship. New mechanisms are needed to ensure that vital scientific information is incorporated into decision-making processes from the start.

BRAZIL CONSOLIDATES AND STRENGTHENS its position as a global leader in the conservation and sustainable development.

In the wake of the promises and commitments made at the Rio+20 summit, renewed efforts are needed to coordinate and scale-up efforts across science, public engagement and policy to protect Brazil's unique natural heritage for this and future generations.

22 June 2012, Bonito, MS, Brazil.