

THE **BIODIVERSITY** CONSULTANCY

IUCN decisions tighten 'no go' for protected areas and other important sites for biodiversity

At the [World Conservation Congress](#) in Hawai'i this September, IUCN members called for a halt to industrial developments that could negatively affect any protected area or key biodiversity area. For industry, the best counter-argument to blanket 'no go' provisions is to demonstrate with real examples that a case-by-case precautionary risk-management approach can achieve better conservation outcomes.



The International Union for Conservation of Nature ([IUCN](#)) brings together government and civil society organisations around the world with a shared goal of nature conservation. Every four years IUCN members meet to discuss motions on pressing conservation issues and adopt these as IUCN resolutions or recommendations. These IUCN decisions have no legal force and are not binding even on IUCN members. Nevertheless they frame the conservation community's aims and expectations, and can be widely influential on policy and practice.



In Hawai'i, two key decisions covered 'no go' areas for development and [biodiversity offsets](#). Adoption of the IUCN [Biodiversity Offsets policy](#) received wide support from members, attesting to extensive prior consultation and robust technical content. The policy is a concise and accessible summary of good offsetting practice and will help IUCN members to understand and apply the mitigation hierarchy. However, the policy defines impacts in any 'no go' area as non-offsettable.



What constitutes a 'no go' area is set out in the recommendation on "Protected areas and other areas important for biodiversity in relation to environmentally damaging industrial activities and

infrastructure development". This motion was contentious but ultimately approved by both Government and NGO members.

What does the 'no go' recommendation say?

- Governments are asked to **prohibit** environmentally damaging industrial activities and infrastructure development **inside** all categories of protected areas, and not to enable such activities by tampering with PA designations. Businesses are asked to respect this 'no go' provision.
- Governments are asked to **restrict** activities that might have negative impacts on PAs (i.e. including activities **outside** them), or on other "areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services that are identified by governments as essential to achieving the Aichi Targets". The likeliest candidates for such sites are [Key Biodiversity Areas](#) identified under the new [IUCN KBA Standard](#). Investors are asked not to fund such activities.
- "Governments, decision makers, community and private landowners" are also asked to **avoid** activities that might have negative impacts on sacred sites or territories, or Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas ([ICCAs](#)).

What does this mean?

- A hard 'no go' for development in **all** categories of protected areas. This rules out more flexible, case-by-case approaches. Instead, businesses are asked to withdraw from activities in PAs and not to undertake them in future.
- Strong discouragement of activities **outside** the boundaries of a protected area if these may have a negative impact on the site.
- Strong discouragement of activities that could damage important **unprotected** sites, which may include ICCAs and Key Biodiversity Areas.

What difference will it make?

- As adopted, the recommendation will be challenging for IUCN Members to implement. There may be conflicts with the multiple-use management objectives of some PAs.^[1]
- It could have unintended negative consequences for conservation, e.g. if governments now postpone designation of new protected areas.
- It will likely increase attention from stakeholders, regulators and financiers to impacts on PAs from activities outside their boundaries, and to important unprotected sites such as KBAs.

- However, it seems unlikely that national governments will rapidly tighten regulatory restrictions on developments in or near protected areas. There is existing (particularly agricultural) development in many protected areas worldwide.
- The onus on business to apply the mitigation hierarchy fully, demonstrating net gains for conservation, will be stronger than ever. For industry, the best counter-argument to blanket 'no go' provisions is to demonstrate with real examples that a case-by-case approach can achieve better conservation outcomes.

[1] E.g. in IUCN Categories IV, V and VI.



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