



## **IUCN calls for the WTO 14<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference to integrate sustainable development as a core principle**

As the 14th Ministerial Conference of the WTO convenes from 26 to 29 March in Yaoundé, Cameroon, a country of exceptional natural diversity, IUCN calls on the Ministers to integrate sustainable development as a fundamental objective of the multilateral trading system, as recognised already in the Marrakesh Agreement establishing the WTO. The need for a global trading system that actively supports sustainable development is only heightened at this time of economic pressures, high geopolitical tensions, and challenges to multilateralism.

Trade policies that incorporate ecological considerations and, more broadly, sustainability strengthen prospects for long-term economic development, food security, access to clean water, livelihoods, and more. The fundamental connections between nature and economies are universal, but they are especially significant for Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and children, and developing countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) that are heavily dependent on ecosystems.

The WTO is central for increasing policy coherence between trade and global environmental commitments, including the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With three major environmental Conferences of the Parties (COPs) – Biodiversity COP 17, Climate COP 31, and Desertification COP17 – taking place in 2026, the recent entry into force of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement, and the Plastics Treaty negotiations ongoing, IUCN calls for the strengthening of the sustainability agenda within the WTO.

The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, adopted in September 2025, is historic, showing that trade agreements can address key drivers of biodiversity loss while supporting livelihoods and food security. However, it is also just one critical step. Trade policies must also address other pressures on nature, such as agricultural production, plastic pollution, extractive industries, wildlife trade, and climate change. This calls for the systemic integration of sustainable development and nature conservation within WTO bodies, negotiations, and reform processes.

### **IUCN urges WTO Members at MC14 to:**

1. Embed biodiversity into all relevant WTO committees, including the ones on trade and environment and its negotiations on environmental goods and services, agriculture, market access, and subsidies, building on Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions (TESSD).
2. Promote coherence with Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) by strengthening the alignment of WTO rules with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) as well as the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement, recognising their complementary objectives.
3. Ensure that WTO reform supports sustainability, equity and a just transition, and the capacity of developing countries to participate in and benefit from nature-positive trade.
4. Advance completion and strengthening of the WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement and expanding agreements to reform environmentally harmful subsidies more broadly, including in agriculture and energy.
5. Continue to support the WTO Dialogue on Plastics Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade (DPP) and strengthen the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystem considerations and nature-based solutions (NbS) when advancing



alternatives and substitutes to plastic products, in line with IUCN policy<sup>1</sup> and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

6. Encourage trade frameworks that ensure sustainable management, use and trade of wild species across both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, in line with IUCN general policy<sup>2</sup> and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

The 14th Ministerial Conference of the WTO is a critical opportunity to move towards fully integrating sustainable development into a rules-based multilateral trading system, enabling greater prosperity for both current and future generations. IUCN looks forward to supporting this through science-based evidence, policy guidance, legal advice, and multi-stakeholder engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> IUCN WCC 2025 Resolution 58 “Advancing actions to end plastic pollution to protect human health, biodiversity and the environment” [WCC-2025-Res-058 | IUCN](#).

<sup>2</sup> IUCN WCC Res 81 Advancing the sustainable management, use and trade of wild species [https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/WCC\\_2025\\_RES\\_081\\_EN.pdf](https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/WCC_2025_RES_081_EN.pdf)