

Wilderness concept put forward as way to mitigate climate change

Wilderness Foundation head Andrew Muir sees SA having an important role to play on the continent

ON November, Mexico welcomed nearly 2 000 delegates from 51 countries for Wild9, the ninth World Wilderness Congress (WWC). Wild9 is a project of The Wild Foundation and sister organisation to the Wilderness Foundation. The WWC is the world's longest running public environmental forum and was founded by South African conservationist Dr Ian Player, with the first congress taking place in 1977. Wild9 brought leaders, communities and partners from around the world to Merida, in the Yucatan.

With the central theme of wilderness, people and climate change, Wild9 addressed the most imperative environmental issues, resulting in nearly 50 targeted resolutions (see <http://www.wild.org/resolutions-from-wild9/>). From my perspective, the most important outcomes included:

- Mexican President Felipe Calderon Hinohosa's announcement of a memorandum of understanding on co-operation for wilderness conservation between Mexico, US and Canada.
- The largest global gathering ever assembled of conservation photogra-

phers and their work.

- The first Corporate Commitment to Wilderness, a results-oriented initiative for wilderness, was signed by 15 corporations, with others to follow.
- New protected areas in Mexico and elsewhere, including a new private sector commitment of 50 000ha in the

Carpathian mountains (Romania), a coastal mangrove protected area in Mexico, and the commitment to a significantly increase in protected area coverage in the Yucatan.

□ The formal launch of the Marine Wilderness Collaborative (MWC) to join stakeholders in a consensus-driven process to define the term "marine wilderness" and set common objectives for the management of marine wilderness protected areas.

Wild9 was the last major international convention on Climate Change currently taking place in Copenhagen. As such, the most important outcome of Wild9 is the strongly worded "Message

from Merida", an international call to action with specific policy guidelines to integrate wilderness and biodiversity conservation into global climate change strategy. It is currently being tabled in Copenhagen.

To quote from a section of this call to action: "Without wilderness, the legacy for future generations is a deeply impoverished planet: biologically, culturally, economically and spiritually. We must act immediately to keep Earth's wilderness intact."

"We have the international mechanisms in place to achieve this global objective in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

"However, the UNFCCC and CBD, two treaties that emerged together from the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, have become separated in their implementation.

"The UNFCCC and the CBD must again be seen as two parts of an inseparable

whole: an integrated and closely coordinated response to global environmental degradation. For the good of the planet, the time has come for a major initiative to reunite climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts with biodiversity conservation and wilderness protection."

It is significant President Jacob Zuma is heading the South African delegation in Copenhagen, and we as a country have set a strong position with ambitious but achievable emission reduction targets. This is important because South Africa needs to set the example and play a leadership role in driving an African response to climate change.

In addition, and with our proud and long history of world class conservation management and protected areas, it is my hope the vital and important role that protected and natural wild areas play as both a mitigation and adaptation strategy to combat the impact of climate change will be highlighted and debated in Copenhagen.

Port Elizabeth-based Andrew Muir is chief executive of the Wilderness Foundation and chairman of the Climate Action Partnership, a climate action alliance of all the main national biodiversity NGOs in South Africa.

He was the 2008 The Herald GM Citizen of the Year.

