

21 July 2006



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Scientists want global body to advise on species loss

Kimani Chege
20 July 2006
Source: SciDev.Net

[NAIROBI] Leading scientists from around the world have called for the creation of an international body to advise governments on ways to avert a catastrophic loss of wild species.



The scimitar-horned oryx is now extinct in the wild

Writing in Nature today, they note that despite clear evidence of widespread decline, biodiversity is "still consistently undervalued and given inadequate weight in both private and public decisions".

The authors include Robert Watson, the World Bank's chief scientist, and two former chairs of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) subsidiary body for scientific, technical and technological advice: Alfred Oteng-Yeboah of Ghana and Peter Schei of Norway.

They say the world needs an equivalent of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change so the global scientific community can inform policymakers about the implications on biodiversity loss and actions that can be taken to limit it.

But they note that biodiversity loss is more complex than issues such as the ozone hole or climate change, and that existing bodies such as the CBD lack the means to mobilise scientific expertise across a broad range of disciplines.

"The threat is not overestimated," says Bob Scholes an ecologist at South Africa's Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, also an author of the Nature article.

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He told SciDev.Net that while there is much uncertainty about how many species will be lost, and where and when, "it is clear that the world is entering a period of species loss that is dramatic and unprecedented in human history".

Co-author Georgina Mace, the director of science at the Institute of Zoology in the United Kingdom, says the proposed panel would not seek to replace bodies such as the CBD and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), but would strengthen scientific inputs into them.

"The scientists' role is intended to be one of providing policy-relevant advice underpinned by the best science," she says.

UNEP's executive director Achim Steiner says: "We clearly need an unprecedented response to this unprecedented situation. The current structures and institutions charged with managing nature's resources in a sustainable way have failed to keep pace with the challenge of continued decline and degradation."

He says that the panel has the potential "to translate scientific and empirical evidence into concrete policy responses and initiatives".

But Steiner adds that such a panel can only succeed if it has strong support from governments.

[Link to full article in Nature](#)

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