

## Statement by the Wildlife Disease Association

### Regarding the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) UK 2021

The Council of the Wildlife Disease Association, a leading international scientific organization representing wildlife health, urges the parties to the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) to act immediately and decisively to transition human society to a carbon neutral future.

The Wildlife Disease Association was founded in 1951 and represents over 1600 wildlife health scientists, professionals and students in over 70 countries. Our membership includes disease ecologists, wildlife veterinarians, biologists, social scientists and wildlife managers who, collectively, have played a critical role in expanding knowledge about wildlife health and disease over the past seven decades.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has highlighted the significant impact that the spillover of wildlife pathogens into people can have on human society. Transmission of diseases between wildlife and domestic animals has been a longstanding concern for both agriculture and wildlife health. The past 25 years has seen the emergence of infectious diseases and environmental disasters that have had significant negative impacts on many wildlife species. Chytrid fungus in amphibians, white-nose syndrome in bats, as well as unprecedented wildfires, droughts and heatwaves have decimated vulnerable populations. As these species decline, the important sociocultural, economic, and environmental values that they have, that ultimately support human society, are weakened or lost.

Climate change is a significant threat to global wildlife health. It leads to more frequent and severe extreme weather events capable of causing mass mortality in wildlife (e.g. bushfires, hurricanes, flooding, heatwaves). It causes disruption to key habitats, and to food and water resources upon which wildlife populations depend. We are seeing changes in animal, plant and infectious organism distributions leading to infectious diseases in wildlife, domestic animals and people where they never occurred before. Finally, climate change creates multiple behavioural, social and physiological stressors that are associated with decreased resilience and ultimately survival of wildlife populations.

Scientific consensus, based on decades of diverse observational and experimental evidence, is that anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions are driving rapid change in the world's climate. Urgent action is needed to transition society to net zero emissions and to reduce the worst impacts of climate change.

The Council of the Wildlife Disease Association calls on and supports all leaders globally, of states and businesses, local and international, to act decisively and with ambition on the commitments made at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26). Effectively protecting the health of wildlife for this and future generations will demand courage and urgency – the time to act is now.

Sincerely,

Andrew Peters

On behalf of the Council of the Wildlife Disease Association