

# Report on the implementation of EU legislation aiming at the conservation of biodiversity

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The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Esther de LANGE (EPP, NL) on the implementation of EU legislation aiming at the conservation of biodiversity. It is deeply concerned about the very fast pace of human-induced biodiversity loss which, if it continues as in the last decades, will leave us with an irreversibly damaged nature by 2050, and underlines that functioning ecosystems are a prerequisite for our subsistence. Members cite the fact that the health check of species and habitat types protected under the Habitats Directive shows that a majority of species have an unfavourable conservation status, that the extinction rate is disturbingly high – according to certain estimates the biodiversity rate has fallen by 30% in the last 40 years – and that the drivers of excessive biodiversity loss show no evidence of declining. The committee is also deeply concerned about the absence of any sense of urgency in halting the loss of biodiversity in the international political agenda. Members call for improved biodiversity governance in internal as well as in external relations.

**The EU and biodiversity:** Members deeply regret that the EU's objective, as agreed to at the Gothenburg Summit in 2001, to halt biodiversity loss by 2010 has not been met and shares the concern expressed by many petitioners to the European Parliament. They also welcome the conclusions on biodiversity of the Environment Council of 15 March 2010, including the new headline target of halting the loss of biodiversity in the EU by 2020. Given the global character of biodiversity and ecosystem services and their crucial role for sustainable development, reducing poverty and improving health, the committee is convinced that the **future EU strategy must also step up EU international efforts to avert biodiversity loss**, as studies such as The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) have delivered sufficient evidence that doing this is cost effective and feasible, and thereby contribute more effectively to achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Members also stress the need for a common EU policy to tackle the problem of invasive alien species.

**Natura 2000:** the committee remains concerned, despite the positive results achieved by some Member States in the conservation status of several species, about the full implementation of Natura 2000 legislation. It urges Member States to give **higher priority to the implementation of Natura 2000**. It is dismayed at the failure of Member States to respect the deadlines laid down in the Directives. Members also express concern about the lack of progress in the establishment of the Natura 2000 network in the marine environment and ask for an acceleration of the necessary procedures, calling on the Commission to adopt a model network of marine protected areas (MPAs) making it possible to reconcile preserving the environment and practising sustainable fishing.

The report takes note of a certain unavoidable degree of subsidiarity in EU environmental legislation, but is concerned that this degree of flexibility can lead to abuses by Member States when implementing it. It regrets the striking differences between Member States regarding, for example, the 'external effect' of Natura 2000 sites, block exemptions for certain 'existing activities' or the application of the precautionary principle. It calls for inquiries into whether the Member States in question are not applying the rules in such a way as to hamper the effective achievement of the intended biodiversity goals. Members also express concern about the lack of cross-border cooperation, which can lead to identical areas being approached differently.

**Integration into other policy areas:** the committee is convinced that the Natura 2000 land and marine network is not the only EU instrument for biodiversity conservation, but that a more integral approach is

needed for the EU biodiversity policy to be successful. It calls on the Commission to ensure a **further mainstreaming of biodiversity into other EU policy areas – such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, regional policy and cohesion, energy, industry, transport tourism, development cooperation, research and innovation** – in a mutually reinforcing way and to make the EU's sectoral and budgetary policies more consistent. Members stress the great opportunities that exist, particularly in the common agricultural policy, regional policy and the common fisheries policy, to give biodiversity a higher priority, and discuss the role that the CAP and fisheries policy could play in achieving the EU's biodiversity objective.

**Economic value of biodiversity:** Members recognise the considerable job potential that is linked to activities connected to tackling the loss of biodiversity and to the development of a sustainable economy and green infrastructure, which by their nature would imply local jobs (which cannot be relocated to third countries), thus contributing considerably to the EU's 2020 Strategy. They draw particular attention to the development of eco- and agri-tourism, whereby recreation and conservation are mutually reinforcing. The committee recognises that rising levels of materials production, trade, and consumption are an important driving force behind biodiversity loss, and therefore calls for measures to develop resource efficiency and sustainable consumption and production policies.

**Financing:** whilst taking note of the Commission's estimates in 2004 for the annual cost of managing the Natura 2000 network at EUR 6.1 billion, Members point out that according to the TEEB report, the return on biodiversity conservation investment is up to a hundred times more. They deplore the fact that no additional sources of funding for the implementation of the NATURA 2000 directives have been made available by the Commission, and that a clear breakdown of the actual amounts being spent per annum on biodiversity conservation in the EU is lacking. Member States and the Commission must cooperate to provide a clearer picture. The committee believes that the Community should take greater responsibility for safeguarding natural values in the Natura 2000 network, particularly in the context of funding. It welcomes the increase in spending for LIFE+ (+ 8% in the 2011 draft budget), but underlines that this instrument continues to represent only a very small part of the EU budget (0.2%). The report notes, moreover, that EU-funded conservation measures are not always continued once Community financing stops. It expects that budgetary constraints will make it more necessary than ever to achieve high added value and increased effectiveness of European spending, including biodiversity spending. Members therefore underline the need to gain greater insight into the effectiveness of biodiversity spending and call on the Commission to provide examples of good practice in terms of effectiveness and added value. They add that public spending alone will not suffice to reach the EU headline target and underline the importance of corporate responsibility to also take into account biodiversity. They call on the Commission to look into means of implementing policies that encourage positive investments and discourage investment which impacts on biodiversity, in both the public and private sectors.

**International aspects:** the report expresses concern about the failure to realise or even approach the global target to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010 and the implications of the continuous biodiversity loss for the MDGs. It calls on the Commission and Member States to support the **mainstreaming of biodiversity into global processes such as the MDGs**. Members urge the Commission to support the **creation of an intergovernmental platform** for policies in the field of biodiversity and ecosystem services science, under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme, and to help create that platform. They want to see the mainstreaming of environmental sustainability in relations with third countries ' alongside respect for social rights and guarantees regarding the protection and participation of local communities in decision-making processes, with particular regard to soil use and forest protection and to continue the 'Green Diplomacy'. Lastly, the committee insists that, in international trade agreements, sustainability of the products being traded is a key element, and underlines the need to incorporate 'non-trade concerns', including production methods and respect for biodiversity, in any future WTO agreement.