Biodiversity, action plans: conservation of natural resources, agriculture, fishing and development

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PURPOSE : to present Biodiversity Action Plans in the areas of Conservation of Natural Resources, Agriculture, Fisheries and Development and Economic Co-operation. CONTENT : the aim of these action plans is to stop losses in wildlife, ecosystems, varieties of crops, domestic animals and fish. The plans define concrete actions and measures and specify measurable targets to ensure a reversal of the current trend. The plans stem from the European Community Biodiversity Strategy adopted in 1998 where the Commission promised to spell out precisely how it would achieve the objectives of the strategy, and implement the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted in Rio in 1992. This Communication presents four specific "sectoral" Bioversity Action Plans on Conservation of Natural Resources; Agriculture; Fisheries; Economic and Development Co-operation. More specifically, the Biodiversity Action Plan on Conservation of Natural Resources demonstrates the Commission's determination to full implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives and to provide support for the conservation and sustainable use of areas designated under these Directives. Even more importantly, it spells out how much it intends to use general environment instruments, such as the water framework directive, the strategy for integrated coastal zone management and environment impact assessment, to help preserve biodiversity across the whole of the Union. The plan also indicates specific environmental initiatives for monitoring and assessing th overall effects on biodiversity from integration efforts in other sectors (i.e. agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture and forestry). As for the Action Plan on Fisheries, it identifies coherent measures aiming to preserve or rehabilitate biodiversity where it is under threat dueto fisheries and aquaculture activities. The measures in this short to medium term action plan have been identified at three levels: the conservation and sustainable use of fish stocks; - the protection of non-target species, habitats and ecosystems from fishing activities; - preventing aquaculture having an impact on different ecosystems. For the first two levels the required measures include a reduction in fisheries activity, the application of technical measures as well as strengthening of research and monitoring. The 2002 Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) review provides an excellent opportunity to introduce new or strenthen existing measures. The Action Plan on Economic and Development Co-operation focuses on poverty eradication as biodiversity and development are interlinked. The major part and the most threatened areas of global biodiversity lie in the forests, wetlands and coral reefs of developing countries which all too often are being destroyed in a self-defeating dash for short-term development. The Action Plan points out the need for improved links with EU Member States and international development cooperation agencies, programmes and institutions in the Member States and at international level (World Bank and the Global Environment Facility). The action plan lists "guiding principles" that need to be followed and sets out the actions to be taken in three inter-linked contexts: 1) in intensive production systems (agriculture, livestock, aquaculture, tree plantations, etc), with the attention to their life-support functions and services, maintenance of genetic diversity and caution regarding alien invasive species and living modified organisims; 2) in production sytems non-domesticated species (forestry, wildlife, fisheries) where the focus should be on maintaining an array of ecosystems and habitats in productive landscapes; 3) in protected areas, where stronger links are needed between conservation action and sustainable development strategies. The Plan emphasises the importance of improving the use of Strategic Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Assessments and focuses on support for building up capacity in this field. Lastly, successful implementation of the Biodiversity and its Action Plans depends, to a large extent, on the effects of relevant measures at Member State level. It is therefore essential to enhance the complementarity between the Community and its Member States biodiversity strategies and action plans. The Commission therefore envisages the establishment of a Biodiversity Expert Committee.