Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010

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The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety unanimously adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Adamos **ADAMOU** (EUL/NGL, CY) in response to the European Commission's communication entitled 'Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 - and beyond: sustaining ecosystem services for human well-being'.

While welcoming with satisfaction the Commission's communication for its conceptual approach, its priority objectives for 2007-2008 and its key supporting measures, Members expressed their concern at the continuing loss of biodiversity and the related decline of ecosystem services. They reaffirmed the urgent need for an effort to meet commitments to halt the loss of biodiversity in the EU by 2010 and stressed that climate change and biodiversity loss are closely linked and are equally important.

They welcome the EU Action Plan but consider that it will be insufficient to conserve biodiversity and sustain ecosystem services in the longer term. The Commission is invited, therefore, to start a process for the development of a long-term EU vision for biodiversity, as a framework for further policy development.

The main points covered by the draft resolution are as follows:

Most important habitats and species (Objective 1): the parliamentary committee stresses the vital role played by the Birds and Habitats Directives in protecting the EU's biodiversity; recognises the importance of completing the NATURA 2000 network on land and at sea. It insists on the importance of additional measures focused on threatened species and recognises the value of extending the use of species action plans in this regard. Members also point out the need to produce tailored measures to promote biodiversity in the new EU Member States and emphasise the importance of the high biodiversity of the outermost regions. They consider that the promotion of selective fishing methods constitutes a priority and welcome the Commission's intention to implement a common maritime policy based on a holistic approach to the oceans.

Wider countryside and wide marine environment (Objectives 2 & 3):

Members recognise that land use planning and exploitation of wild species (through hunting and fishing) are key factors affecting biodiversity and ecosystem services. They stress, in particular, threats to high-nature-value farmland and forests posed by both intensification and abandonment, the threats posed to fish stocks, non-target species and marine habitats caused by ecologically unsustainable fishing practices including illegal fishing and fishing using destructive and non-selective technologies.

MEPs urge Member States to exploit all available opportunities under the CAP and CFP to support the biodiversity targets in the wider countryside and the wide marine environment (i.e. outside Natura 2000 sites). They call for the further integration of biodiversity and ecosystem service considerations into the CAP and CFP and the identification in particular of the opportunity provided in this regard by the 2008-09 budget review.

The Commission is called upon to draw up a specific action programme to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU); to consolidate the NATURA 2000 network further by extending it to the new Member States; to encourage and support studies linked to the rearing of new species in captivity,

particularly species affected by over-fishing; to revise the management and recovery plans for certain fish species; to verify more closely compliance with Community laws linked to the fight against the pollution and degradation of marine ecosystems

Given the threat to ecosystems from certain pesticides, flame retardants and other persistent, bio-accumulative and toxic chemicals, Members stress the importance of effective implementation of REACH, stressing the need to monitor bio-accumulation of such pollutants through the use of top predators in terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments and call for special attention to be given to the hazards of pesticide use.

Members propose that biodiversity should be one of the main principles of the 'health check' on the CAP due to be carried out in 2008.

Regional and territorial development (Objective 4): the Committee urges Member States to: ensure that projects funded by cohesion and structural funds do not harm biodiversity and ecosystem services but optimise benefits to biodiversity; prioritise maintenance and recovery of biodiversity and ecosystem services in spatial planning at national, regional and local levels; ensure adequate consideration of biodiversity in strategic environmental assessments (SEA) and environmental impact assessments (EIA).

Invasive alien species and Alien Genotypes (Objective 5): Members call on the Commission to take steps towards proposing legislation to limit the introduction of alien species in the European Union and monitoring the fulfilment of the CITES Convention. They call for urgent measures to prevent the transfer of organisms in ballast water and the implementation of the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ship's Ballast Water and Sediments under the IMO. The Commission is invited to introduce effective controls on the discharge of ballast water within EU waters.

The Committee expresses its concern at the possibility of genetically modified fish escaping into marine ecosystems and the likelihood of their reproducing with local fish, and therefore calls on the Commission to prohibit genetically modified fish intended for the EU food chain from entering the EU.

International governance (Objective 6): The Committeestrongly supports the effective implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and urges EU leadership in this respect. It stresses that the mutual support and synergy between international environmental agreements should be increased and proposes that third countries receiving EU subsidies should respect EU biodiversity policies.

It urges the putting in place of an agreement on the protection of biodiversity in the high seas under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. In view of the threat to biodiversity posed by deep sea bottom-trawling and other unsustainable fishing practices, it urges the Commission to come forward as soon as possible with legislative proposals on bottom fisheries in the high seas. Members also advocate the integration of the biodiversity dimension into international trade and into global efforts to change unsustainable production and consumption patterns.

External assistance (Objective 7): The Committee emphasises the vital importance of effective 'mainstreaming' of biodiversity concerns in Community and Member State external assistance programmes (including budgetary support measures) to ensure that they do not result in harm to biodiversity and ecosystem services. It expresses strong concern that, despite the policy aspirations, in reality there is a high risk that the new generation of Country and Regional Strategy Papers will continue to disregard biodiversity needs without a much more proactive engagement of the Commission **with recipient countries in this regard.**

Trade (Objective 8): The Committee urges the Commission and Member States to identify major impacts of trade on biodiversity and ecosystem services, in particular through sustainability impact assessments. It expresses deep concern at the EU imports of commodities, including wood, palm oil and soybean, which

drive tropical deforestation. Urgent action is called for from the Commission and Member States to adopt measures to prevent or minimise negative impacts from such trade on tropical forests, including bilateral agreements under the forest law enforcement, governance and trade (FLEGT) programme.

Climate change (Objective 9): The Committee stresses the vital importance of an ecosystem approach for adaptation to climate change, in particular in relation to policies which affect land, water and marine use. It calls on the EU to continue taking a strong lead internationally in working to decrease global greenhouse emissions. Members also stress the importance of ensuring that climate change mitigation measures, such as the development of renewable sources of energy, should be assessed to ensure they take due account of potential negative impacts on biodiversity and that such impacts should be prevented or minimised – notably in relation to windfarms and biofuels. They emphasise the need to reduce 'conventional' pressures on ecosystems (fragmentation, overexploitation, pollution, invasive alien species), the need to devise additional measures tailored to address the additional pressure of climate change, as well as the need for an urgent assessment of habitats and species most at risk from climate change.

Knowledge (Objective 10): Recognising the need for more effective mechanisms to bring the evidence base relating to biodiversity and ecosystem services to bear on policy at Community, Member State and international levels, the Committee calls on the Commission to prepare studies and assessments on the impacts of renewable energy production on biodiversity and on the change in biodiversity in urban areas, including both the positive and the negative impacts of new species appearing in urban areas. It, therefore, calls on the Commission to finance studies into marine ecosystems, particularly in areas with rich biodiversity and intensive fishing activity.

Financing

Members express serious concern at financial constraints for support to Natura 2000 and other biodiversity actions in the EU Action Plan to 2010 and Beyond, resulting from Financial Framework decisions. They stress the responsibility of Member States to take up all available opportunities under the CAP, CFP, Cohesion and Structural Funds and Life+ and Seventh Framework Programme and to allocate national resources. They urge that greater consideration be given to financial needs in the 2008-09 budget review.

They urge the Commission and Member States to significantly strengthen programmes and campaigns to educate and inform the general public, to build political demand for action, and to strengthen the active participation of the general public in conservation measures. Lastly, the Committee highlights the vital importance of strengthening long-term monitoring capacities and methods in support of the set of indicators and to provide broader sources of information on the state of biodiversity.