

Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010

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PURPOSE : to put forward key policy areas for action for halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 and putting biodiversity on course for recovery.

CONTENT : this paper discusses measures to halt the decline in both the variety and extent of natural systems — of biodiversity. This loss of biodiversity, at the levels of ecosystems, species and genes, is of concern not just because of the important intrinsic value of nature, but also because it results in a decline in ‘ecosystem services’ which natural systems provide. These services include production of food, fuel, fibre and medicines, regulation of water, air and climate, maintenance of soil fertility, cycling of nutrients.

At Community level, the policy framework to halt biodiversity loss in the EU is now largely in place. Biodiversity objectives are, for example, integrated in the Sustainable Development Strategy and the Lisbon partnership as well as in a wide range of environmental and sector policies. An EC Biodiversity Strategy was adopted in 1998 and related Action Plans in 2001. Most Member States have also developed such strategies. While important progress has been made and there are first signs of slowing rates of loss, the pace and extent of implementation has been insufficient. Achievement of the 2010 target is still possible but will require accelerated implementation at both Community and Member State levels.

Two particular threats to EU biodiversity are highlighted:

- ill-considered land use and development. Member States have particular responsibility, through improved planning, to reconcile land use and development needs with the conservation of biodiversity and maintenance of ecosystem services;
- the increasing impact of climate change on biodiversity. This reinforces the imperative for effective action on greenhouse gas emissions beyond the Kyoto Protocol targets.

This Communication outlines the extent of the problem and reviews the adequacy of the EU response so far. It then identifies key policy areas for action, and related objectives and supporting measures to deliver the 2010 targets and put biodiversity on course for recovery. These are translated into specific targets and actions in the annexed “EU Action Plan to 2010 and Beyond.” This is addressed to both Community institutions and Member States and specifies the responsibilities of each in order to pull together action. The Plan is based on, and strongly supported by, wide-ranging expert and public consultation.

The paper introduces the four key policy areas and ten priority objectives, explains their scope, and highlights some of the key actions identified in the Action Plan.

Policy Area 1: Biodiversity in the EU

Objectives:

- 1) to safeguard the EU's most important habitats and species;
- 2) to conserve and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services in the wider EU countryside;
- 3) to conserve and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services in the wider EU marine environment. Key actions include: optimising the use of available measures under the reformed CAP, notably to prevent intensification or abandonment of high-nature-value farmland, woodland and forest and supporting their

restoration; implementing forthcoming Forest Action Plan; optimising the use of available measures under the reformed CFP, notably to restore fish stocks, reduce impacts on non-target species and reduce damages to marine habitats; and advancing implementation of key environmental framework directives and thematic strategies which reduce pressures on biodiversity.

4) to reinforce compatibility of regional and territorial development with biodiversity in the EU.

Key actions include: ensuring that community funds for regional development benefit, and do not damage, biodiversity; and building partnerships between planners, developers and biodiversity interests.

5) to reduce the impact on EU biodiversity of invasive alien species and alien genotypes. Various measures for the prevention and control of invasive alien species are in place but some policy gaps may remain; a comprehensive EU strategy should be developed for this purpose as well as specific actions including an early warning system.

Policy area 2: the EU and global biodiversity.

Objectives:

6) to strengthen effectiveness of international governance for biodiversity and ecosystem services;

7) to strengthen support for biodiversity and ecosystem services in EU external assistance;

8) to substantially reduce the impact of international trade on global biodiversity and ecosystem services.

A more coherent EU approach is required, which ensures synergy between actions for governance, trade (including bilateral agreements) and development cooperation. Regarding governance, the EU should focus on more effective implementation of the CBD and related agreements. Regarding external assistance, the EU should enhance 'earmarked' funds for biodiversity and strengthen mainstreaming of biodiversity into sector and geographical programmes. Regarding trade, measures to address tropical deforestation, including trade in commodities which drive deforestation, are particularly urgent.

Policy Area 3 : Biodiversity and climate change

Objective:

9) to support biodiversity adaptation to climate change. Substantial cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions are required to mitigate the longer-term threat to biodiversity.

Policy Area 4: the knowledge base

Objective:

10) to strengthen substantially the knowledge base for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, in the EU and globally. This requires strengthening (under FP7 and national research programmes) the European Research Area, its international dimension, research infrastructures, the science-policy interface and data interoperability for biodiversity.

The four key supporting measures:

1) ensuring adequate financing: this is essential, both for Natura 2000 and for biodiversity outside Natura 2000. The new Financial Perspectives for 2007–13 open opportunities for cofinancing of biodiversity and Natura 2000 under the Fund for Rural Development, the Cohesion and Structural Funds, Life+and FP7.

However, the budget reduction foreseen by the December European Council would certainly influence funding options for biodiversity under these instruments. Consequently, national implementation choices will be crucial. The Community and Member States will need to ensure, through Community co-financing and Member States' own resources, adequate financing of the Action Plan, notably in relation to Natura 2000, high-nature-value farmland and forests, marine biodiversity, global biodiversity, biodiversity research, monitoring and inventory. In any case the allocation of Community financial resources should take into account the budgetary constraints and be within the limits of the new Financial Perspectives.

2) strengthening EU decision-making. This includes: improving coordination between Community and Member States, notably through the BEG; and ensuring existing and new policies and budgets (including those developed under Lisbon Strategy National Reform Programmes) take due account of biodiversity needs.

3) building partnerships between government, academia, conservation practitioners, landowners and users, private sector, finance sector, educational sector and the media to frame solutions.

4) building public education, awareness and participation.