

EU

Action Plans to Protect Biodiversity

The European Commission has adopted a series of action plans to integrate the protection of biodiversity into EU agricultural, fishery, environment and development policies. The plans define concrete actions and measures and set measurable targets to ensure a reversal of the accelerated loss of biodiversity experienced in all Member States and worldwide.

The action plans stem from the EU Biodiversity Strategy adopted in 1998, whereby the Commission promised to lay down exactly how it would achieve the objectives of the Strategy, and implement the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity.

The Community Biodiversity Strategy defines a framework for action and focuses on integration of biodiversity

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concerns into relevant sectoral policies, such as agriculture, fisheries, conservation of natural resources and economic and development cooperation.

The four new action plans outline the necessary steps to tackle the loss in biodiversity in the relevant sectoral areas. They also establish how to identify appropriate indicators for monitoring and evaluating performance in the implementation of the actions and measures envisaged and their effectiveness.

The action plan on *conservation of natural resources* sets out how it intends to use general environment instruments, such as the water framework Directive, the Strategy for Integrated Coastal Zone Management and environmental impact assessment, to help preserve biodiversity across the whole of the European Union. It also indicates specific environment initiatives for monitoring and assessing the overall effects on biodiversity from integration efforts in other sectors.

The action plan focuses on enhancing opportunities and synergies with relevant international agreements and processes. In particular,

- the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES);
- the Climate Change and Desertification Conventions;
- the Barcelona and OSPAR Conventions on marine protection;
- the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety;
- the Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer;
- the World Trade Organisation (WTO) /TRIPS;
- the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO); and
- the international process on forests.

The action plan on *agriculture* begins with an analysis of the interrelations between farming and biological diversity. It indicates seven priorities to achieve reciprocal benefits between farming activities and biodiversity. These are:

- Ensuring a reasoned intensification in agricultural practices.
- Maintaining an economically viable and socially acceptable agricultural activity, in particular in biodiversity-rich areas, where these activities have been weakened.
- Using the potential of agri-environmental measures for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.
- Ensuring the existence of an ecological infrastructure at the level of the whole territory.
- Supporting actions aimed at the enhancement of genetic diversity in agriculture and in the maintenance of local and traditional varieties and breeds.
- Encouraging the marketing of primitive species and varieties that are naturally adapted to the local and regional conditions.
- Preventing the abundance and spreading of non-native species.

The action plan on *fisheries* considers the threats due to both conventional 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.

With regard to the first two levels, the required measures include a reduction in fisheries activity, the application of technical measures, as well as the strengthening of research and monitoring. For aquaculture, measures seek to reduce the environmental impact of fish farming, limit the introduction of alien invasive species, secure animal health and strengthen research to enhance knowledge in this area.

The action plan on *economic and development cooperation* focuses on poverty eradication as biodiversity and development are interlinked.

The plan notes that the major part and most threatened areas of global biodiversity lie in the forests, wetlands and coral reefs of developing countries, which are being destroyed in the rush for short-term development. In the action plan, the EU states its responsibility to help these countries to preserve the natural resources essential to the well-being of their societies. It notes 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. It also considers the need for building up capacity to manage development and environment issues within the Commission.

The action plan lists “guiding principles” that need to be followed and sets out the actions to be taken in three inter-linked contexts:

- In intensive production systems (agriculture, livestock, aquaculture, tree plantations, *etc.*), with attention to their life-support functions and services, maintenance of genetic diversity, and caution regarding alien invasive species and living modified organisms.
- In production systems involving non-domesticated species (forestry, wildlife, fisheries, *etc.*) where the focus should be on maintaining an array of ecosystems and habitats in productive landscapes.
- In protected areas, where stronger links are needed between conservation action and sustainable development strategies.

The action plan also emphasises the importance of improving the use of Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) and Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), and focuses on support for building up capacity in this field. (MJ)

