



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 25 June 2009

11412/09

**ENV 465
AGRI 284
DEVGEN 188
PI 61
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PECHE 167
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INFORMATION NOTE

from : General Secretariat

to : Delegations

Subject : A mid-term assessment of implementing the EU Biodiversity Action Plan and
Towards an EU Strategy on Invasive Alien Species
– Council conclusions

Delegations will find attached the conclusions adopted by the Council (Environment) on
25 June 2009.

**A mid-term assessment of implementing the EU Biodiversity Action Plan
and Towards an EU Strategy on Invasive Alien Species
- Council Conclusions -**

RECALLING the target established by the European Council in Gothenburg in 2001 of halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 within the EU, as well as the EU's commitment to the global target to significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010; and STRESSING the short time remaining until this key milestone;

REAFFIRMING the priorities set out in the Council conclusions of 18 December 2006 on "Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010", which invited the Commission and the Member States to proceed urgently with the implementation of the "EU Action Plan to 2010 and Beyond" proposed by the Commission, as appropriate, and which *inter alia* called for an EU strategy on invasive alien species (IAS);

WELCOMING the presentation by the Commission of its communications "A mid-term assessment of implementing the EC Biodiversity Action Plan" and "Towards an EU Strategy on invasive species";

DEEPLY CONCERNED by the Commission's assessment that the EU is unlikely to meet its 2010 target of halting biodiversity decline, and ALARMED by the increasing threats to biodiversity from invasive alien species; STRESSING that biodiversity loss is extremely worrying both for the important intrinsic value of nature and biodiversity, but also because it results in a decline in ecosystem functions that are essential in providing vital ecosystem services which underpin long-term sustainable development, and on which a healthy environment, food security and human livelihoods, particularly of the world's poorest, depend;

RECOGNISING that the Member States and the Commission have launched a number of positive initiatives and have made progress in the delivery of the EU Biodiversity Action Plan, although so far not with sufficient results with regard to the objective of halting biodiversity loss in the EU;

STRONGLY EMPHASISING that significant additional efforts are urgently needed to reverse these trends and HIGHLIGHTING the importance of strengthening the integration of biodiversity and ecosystem concerns into relevant sectoral policies and of effective implementation of existing EU policies and legislation to address the biodiversity challenge;

The Council of the European Union:

I. A mid-term assessment of implementing the EC Biodiversity Action Plan

Biodiversity in the EU

1. HIGHLIGHTS the important role of NATURA 2000 in the delivery of biodiversity policy in the EU, and URGES the Commission and the Member States to complete the terrestrial part of the NATURA 2000 network by 2010, to strengthen efforts to finalise the network at sea by 2012, and to enhance coherence and connectivity of the network and thus resilience of species and of ecosystems; furthermore STRESSES the importance of effective management and, where appropriate, restoration of sites to reach a favourable conservation status of habitats and species of Community interest;

2. NOTES with great concern the Commission's assessment that about half of the species, and about two thirds of the habitat types of European Community interest have a bad or inadequate conservation status and WELCOMES the Commission's intention to provide updated information on the status and trends of biodiversity within the EU before the end of 2009, and REITERATES the need to establish, by mid-2010 at the latest, a vision and targets beyond 2010 for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity within the EU, in line with the Council conclusions of 2 March 2009;
3. In this regard TAKES NOTE with appreciation of the high-level conference in Athens on "Biodiversity Protection - Beyond 2010", organised by the Commission in April 2009 to examine possible priorities and options for a future EU biodiversity policy;
4. INVITES the Commission to continue monitoring and promoting the sharing of practical experiences with the implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directives, with the aim of strengthening their effective and efficient implementation, and to report to Council on these experiences; EMPHASISES the need to facilitate both at Community and Member State level broad support of all stakeholders for Natura 2000, to enhance the integration of Natura 2000 into other relevant policies, and to promote the use of flexible approaches and best practices in line with existing legislation;
5. CONSIDERS that there is a need to better determine how much Community assistance benefits biodiversity, notably through rural development and regional development funding as well as the Common Fisheries Policy; INVITES the Commission, in collaboration with Member States, to assess whether the integrated approach for the financing of NATURA 2000 has been adequate for the effective implementation of the network and EMPHASISES the importance of adequately considering biodiversity funding needs in the forthcoming EU budget review;

6. URGES the Commission and Member States to make more use – without creating unnecessary administrative burdens – of the existing and new opportunities to strengthen biodiversity conservation provided for in rural development policy and under cross-compliance arising from the health check of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) and to report on these, using existing reporting provisions to the extent possible and avoiding unnecessary administrative burdens;
7. UNDERLINES the importance of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive as an important instrument to contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity; RECALLS the Council conclusions of 29 September 2008 and NOTES the progress made in implementing the ecosystem approach in the management of the marine environment under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP); EMPHASISES the importance of bringing the fishing pressure to sustainable levels and of implementing measures to minimise the impact on non-target species and habitats; REQUESTS the Commission and the Member States to take these objectives into account in the upcoming reform of the CFP;
8. UNDERLINES the decisive role of biodiversity and ecosystem goods and services for economic and social prosperity; URGES the Commission and Member States to further strengthen the integration of biodiversity and ecosystem services considerations and targets into policies and programmes for the relevant sectors at national as well as at EU level, underpinned by biodiversity-relevant indicators in order to better measure the drivers of biodiversity loss relevant to specific sectors;
9. RECOGNISES the critical importance of biodiversity conservation in the EU's outermost regions and overseas territories; RECALLS the "Message from Reunion Island" and WELCOMES efforts to develop a voluntary scheme to promote conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services in European outermost regions and overseas entities which are not covered by EU nature legislation, inspired by the experience acquired with EU nature conservation policy, including NATURA 2000;

The EU and global biodiversity

10. UNDERLINES the need to develop before the end of 2009 key strategic principles in order to facilitate an active participation by the EU in deliberations at global level on the future CBD Strategic Plan and a vision for biodiversity beyond 2010, in keeping with the Council conclusions of 2 March 2009;
11. TAKES note with great interest of the preliminary results of the Study on The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB), which aims to promote a better understanding of the true economic value and the benefits arising from biodiversity and the ecosystem services it provides and of the linkages to poverty issues; RECOGNISES the need to develop tools and policies to properly value ecosystem goods and services and to make better use of economic incentives for the sustainable use of ecosystem services such as through market-based instruments; LOOKS FORWARD to the final results of the study expected for 2010;
12. STRESSES the need to mainstream biodiversity in the development strategies of both donor and recipient countries and to ensure that, in connection with EU external assistance, Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) are carried out and Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) are undertaken systematically and with due regard for biodiversity in relation to environmentally-sensitive aid operations funded by Member States and the Commission;
13. TAKES NOTE with appreciation of the commitments, undertaken by 21 countries and relevant international organisations participating in the G8 Environment Ministers meeting, in the "Carta di Siracusa" in April 2009, highlighting the crucial role of biodiversity and ecosystem services for human well-being, including food security, for reaching the Millennium Development Goals, for climate change adaptation and mitigation and for achieving a sustainable economy, also in the face of the current economic crisis;

14. RECOGNISES that consumption patterns in the EU result in a large ecological footprint at global level and that these need to be fully reflected in the analysis and recommendations made by the Commission in Sustainability Impact Assessments (SIAs) of trade negotiations and acted upon; EMPHASISES the need to enhance the understanding of the impact of EU consumption of food and non-food commodities (e.g. meat, soy beans, palm oil, metal ores) on biodiversity loss and subsequently reduce negative impact and promote sustainable patterns of production and consumption;
15. RECALLS the Council conclusions of 4 December 2008 on "Addressing the challenges of deforestation and forest degradation to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss" and that deforestation and forest degradation are major drivers of biodiversity loss; IS DEEPLY CONCERNED that forests, in particular tropical forests which are home to half of all land-based species, are disappearing at an alarming rate, and REITERATES the need for rapid and effective action to address this loss;

Biodiversity and climate change

16. EMPHASISES the need for a better understanding and full recognition of the critical role of biodiversity and healthy ecosystems that are able to resist environmental stresses such as climate change;
17. HIGHLIGHTS the fact that terrestrial and marine ecosystems, which currently absorb roughly half of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, constitute a major buffer against the impacts of climate change, and that continued degradation of these ecosystems reduces their capacity as carbon sinks and to protect against floods and soil erosion, which compromises our efforts to mitigate, and our capacity to adapt to, climate change;

18. DEEPLY CONCERNED about the impacts of climate change on biodiversity and the world's poorest, EMPHASISES the need to pursue a significantly improved understanding of the role of human communities and ecosystems in adaptation measures as well as the possible application of ecosystem-based approaches in this context, with a view to strengthening their resilience and adaptive capacity and generating additional economic and social benefits; in this regard, WELCOMES ongoing activities within the Convention on Biological Diversity;
19. CALLS for greater synergies between measures for climate change mitigation and adaptation and for combating land degradation and desertification, and the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems, in order to fully exploit and maximise co-benefits;
20. IS CONCERNED at the risk that the expansion of crops dedicated to the production of biomass and biofuels, although with the aim of replacing fossil fuels and thus potentially reducing global greenhouse gas emissions, will, in the absence of proper evaluation and adequate environmental safeguards, have a negative impact on biodiversity and food security, and possibly increase climate impacts; REITERATES that bio-energy production and consumption should be sustainable in relation to biological diversity and EMPHASISES the need to utilise sustainability criteria for biofuels and to establish such criteria for biomass production for energy use;

The knowledge base and monitoring

21. EMPHASISES the need to ensure that Member States' and Community research funding adequately support biodiversity policy and that this should be fully reflected in European Union Research and Technological Development (EU RTD) policy and programmes;

22. CONCERNED that funding for biodiversity monitoring lags substantially behind national and Community investments focused on other environmental issues and CALLS ON Member States and the Commission to increase it significantly, as appropriate;
23. REITERATES the need to strengthen the science-policy interface on biodiversity and ecosystem services and WELCOMES UNEP's process to establish an Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES); REAFFIRMS that the EU stands ready to participate actively in this process and in further meetings during 2009 and 2010, and HOPES that discussions on how best to mobilise and draw on research-based advice on biodiversity can be concluded in a constructive and time-efficient way by 2010;
24. WELCOMES the efforts to streamline European Biodiversity Indicators through the SEBI 2010 project, but STRESSES that they need to be complemented by other indicators, especially indicators designed to assess progress in sectoral policies; INVITES Member States to contribute to the SEBI 2010 project and report on the implementation of and assessment of associated national indicators;
25. CALLS ON the Commission to present a full assessment of the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Action Plan in 2010, on the basis of an evaluation of progress at both Community and Member State level;

Supporting measures

26. INVITES the Commission to proceed with the establishment of the EU Business and Biodiversity technical support platform; ENCOURAGES Member States to develop national business and biodiversity initiatives and partnerships to engage business in integrating biodiversity considerations into their activities, taking into account the objectives of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity;

27. REITERATES the importance of raising awareness among stakeholders and the public at large on the overarching value of biodiversity; URGES the Commission and the Member States to intensify their efforts on communication, including public awareness-raising campaigns; in this context LOOKS FORWARD to the EU communication campaign on biodiversity as stipulated in the EU Biodiversity Action Plan proposed by the Commission and which could use the valuable experience gained with the "Countdown 2010" initiative in promoting the 2010 biodiversity target; URGES that full advantage must be taken of 2010 as the UN International Year on Biodiversity to promote awareness of and global actions for biodiversity at all levels;

II. Towards an EU Strategy on Invasive Alien Species (IAS)

28. RECALLS the rapidly growing threats and impacts of invasive alien species, causing biodiversity loss and damage to the environment, economic activities and human health; NOTES WITH CONCERN that costs related to IAS issues are estimated to be at least EUR 12,7 billion per year in the EU, as indicated by the Commission, and that due to the expansion of trade, without appropriate safeguards against IAS, the threats from IAS are increasing at an accelerated pace; therefore UNDERLINES the urgency of responding efficiently and effectively to these threats;
29. UNDERLINES that the cooperation of all Member States and the Commission in addressing IAS issues such as information sharing, prevention of introduction and spread, early warning, monitoring and eradication is a necessary condition for successful management of IAS;

30. NOTES that IAS occurrence is often caused by intentional, but also unintentional, introduction through various pathways; HIGHLIGHTS the need for identification and regulation of these pathways, proportional to the associated environmental and socio-economic risks which have to be evaluated, clear definition of responsibilities, and comprehensive assessment of the risks and impacts of existing invasive alien species and those which could potentially be introduced intentionally or unintentionally, in relation to e.g. aquaculture, horticulture, cultivation and farming, and species trade, taking into account the existing EU regulatory provisions in the respective sectors;
31. NOTES the fragmentation, generality and lack of consistency of legislation addressing IAS at Community as well as Member State level and of provisions within international agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other international instruments (e.g. IPPC¹, EPPO² and CITES); HIGHLIGHTS the need for strategic and comprehensive approaches, improved cooperation, and action at international, national and regional level;
32. RECALLS the urgent need for an EU strategy on invasive alien species, taking into account in particular the guiding principles enshrined in relevant CBD decisions³, the European Strategy on Invasive Alien Species under the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, and the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation recommendations, as well as existing EU plant health legislation such as Directive 2000/29/EC on protective measures against the introduction of organisms harmful to plants;

¹ IPPC: International Plant Protection Convention, www.ippc.int

² EPPO: European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation, www.eppo.org

³ CBD COP Decision VI/23, Decision VIII/27 and Decision IX/4

33. CALLS FOR an effective Strategy which should fill the existing gaps at EU level and establish a comprehensive EU IAS framework in a proportionate and cost-effective manner including by providing for new, dedicated legislative elements and, where necessary, amending or incorporating existing provisions; STRESSES that the strategy should contain the following aspects: i) prevention, including trade-related aspects, and information exchange, ii) early detection, warning and rapid response, including prevention of spread and eradication, iii) monitoring, control and long-term containment, and iv) restoration of biodiversity affected by IAS as far as feasible; INVITES the Commission to prepare this strategy by 2010;
34. CALLS FOR the development of the strategy to take into account the biogeographic approach, as well as specific circumstances of islands and ultra-peripheral regions, which often are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of IAS, and the need for enhanced regional and international cooperation; IS OF THE VIEW that the situation of some of the feral species should be considered in this context;
35. HIGHLIGHTS the fact that the Strategy should provide for the establishment and maintenance of a comprehensive inventory of IAS (which could be based on the DAISIE⁴ list of alien species in Europe and other existing European inventories and mechanisms such as NOBANIS⁵), and common standards for risk assessment processes, for example Pest Risk Analysis (PRA) as described in the IPPC's International Standards to reduce the risk of intentional and unintentional introduction of alien organisms while respecting regional nature and socio-economic aspects;
36. RECOGNISES that the existing EU phytosanitary and pest management regulatory principles and legal instruments are not applicable to a wide range of IAS, which may be introduced intentionally or unintentionally, and to other biodiversity threats, but that nevertheless these principles can serve as a baseline for an IAS strategy framework;

⁴ DAISIE: Delivering Alien Invasive Species Inventory for Europe; Handbook of Alien Species in Europe, www.europe-aliens.org

⁵ NOBANIS: North European and Baltic Network on Invasive Alien Species; www.nobanis.org

37. UNDERLINES the urgent need for the Commission and the Member States to jointly develop an appropriate information system for early warning and rapid response, including through developing and updating specific lists of IAS, linking European lists to international lists, cooperating on biosecurity and control measures within the EU and with neighbouring countries and with international organisations;
38. STRESSES the impact of future spread of IAS caused by the shifting of biota and changes *inter alia* in agriculture and forestry practices due to climate change, through the introduction of resilient species and/or varieties such as drought-tolerant crops; thus INVITES the Commission, as well as Member States, to integrate IAS considerations into relevant EU and national policies, in particular trade, agricultural, forestry, aquaculture, transport and tourism policies, with a view to preventing the threats caused by IAS;
39. UNDERLINES the importance of addressing unintentional introduction of Invasive Alien Species, particularly in marine ecosystems, using available tools such as the Ballast Water Convention;
40. STRESSES the importance of adequate financing for research, monitoring, prevention of introduction and spread, early detection and eradication of IAS and transboundary and international cooperation, and UNDERLINES the role of Member States and the Commission in increasing public awareness, responsibility and education, and ensuring public participation and involvement as well as engaging relevant sectors that play a role in the movement of IAS, including by encouraging the application of voluntary codes of good practices.