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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Biodiversity Action Plans in the areas of Conservation of Natural Resources, Agriculture, Fisheries, and Development and Economic Co-operation

1. FACING UP TO OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

1.1. The threat

1. During recent decades, the reduction and loss of biodiversity in Europe and worldwide has accelerated dramatically and existing measures have proved to be insufficient to reverse present trends¹. These trends include reduction and loss in terms of species and their habitats, ecosystems and genes. For example,
 - 64 endemic plants of Europe have become extinct in nature and 45% of butterflies, 38% of birds species, 24% of the species and subspecies of certain groups of plants, and some 5% of mollusc species are already considered as threatened.
 - In some European countries, more than two-thirds of the existing habitat types are considered endangered.
 - Agricultural intensification has reduced the area of wetlands in Europe by some 60% in the last decades. Natural riverine forest used to cover 2,000 km² along the Rhine. Nowadays it is highly fragmented and covers only a total of 150 km².
 - 97 breeds of domestic animals have become extinct in recent times in Western Europe. This includes 9 breeds of cattle, 4 of goats, 54 of pigs and 30 of sheep. Almost 30% of the surviving breeds are currently under risk. In some Member States the situation is even more serious since, according to FAO, up to 43% of domestic animal breeds are threatened.
 - Worldwide, a total of 11,046 species of plants and animals face a high risk of extinction in the near future, in almost all cases as a result of human activity. That means one in 4 mammal species and one in 8 bird species. According to FAO, worldwide 37% of domestic animals are endangered. International trade in wildlife is recognised as the cause of global threat for 30,000 species.
 - In the Amazon alone, the total area deforested per year has increased from 30,000 km² in 1975 to at least 600,000 km² at present, while an area twice as large is affected biologically.
2. We have an ethical responsibility to preserve biodiversity for its intrinsic value. It also provides the food, fibre and drinks that our society needs. It is essential for

¹ Environment in the European Union at the turn of the century. Environmental assessment report No.2. European Environment Agency. Copenhagen, 1999.

maintaining the long-term viability of agriculture and fisheries, and is the basis of many industrial processes and the production of new medicines. It constitutes part of the world's natural capital on which many local communities and society at large relies. A loss of biodiversity is a loss of economic opportunity.

3. Preserving biodiversity does not require just action to implement traditional nature conservation policies. Specific protection measures for key species and habitats are essential but are not, by themselves, a satisfactory response to the problem of biodiversity loss. Conservation requires action beyond the 10-20% of the world's territory that could potentially be designated as protected areas. It is also important to address emerging issues such as the spread of endocrine disrupting and persistent organic chemicals and the proliferation of alien invasive species, as well as assessing and monitoring relevant effects of the introduction of specific GMOs. Moreover, the main underlying causes of biodiversity loss stem from the design and implementation of a number of sectoral and horizontal policies affecting the globe's biosphere. It is therefore of paramount importance to integrate biodiversity needs into the development and implementation of relevant sectoral policies. This is not only an environmental problem but also a wider sustainability issue since biodiversity loss harms the natural capital resources on which social and economic development is based.

1.2. The response:- The 1998 Community Biodiversity Strategy and the present Action Plans

4. To counter this threat to the well-being of present or future generations, in February 1998 the Commission adopted a Communication to the Council and the Parliament on a European Community Biodiversity Strategy.², which aimed “*to anticipate, prevent and attack the causes of significant reduction or loss of biodiversity at the source. This should help both to reverse present trends in biodiversity reduction or losses and to place species and ecosystems, which includes agro-ecosystems, at a satisfactory conservation status, both within and beyond the territory of the Union*”.
5. The Council endorsed the Strategy in June³, as did the Parliament in October⁴ of the same year.
6. The European Community Biodiversity Strategy defines a precise framework for action, by setting out four major themes⁵ and specifying sectoral and horizontal objectives to be achieved. The Strategy focuses specifically on the integration of biodiversity concerns into relevant sectoral policies, in particular: conservation of natural resources, agriculture, fisheries, regional policies and spatial planning, forests, energy and transport, tourism, development and economic co-operation.
7. With the adoption of the Biodiversity Strategy, the Commission took the first step towards implementing its most important obligation as a Party to the United Nations

² Communication from the Commission to the Council and to the Parliament on a European Community Biodiversity Strategy (COM (1998) 42).

³ Council Conclusions of 21 June 1998

⁴ European Parliament. Non legislative resolution A4-0347/98

⁵ The Strategy builds around four themes: (1) Conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity; (2) Sharing of benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources; (3) Research, identification, monitoring and exchange of information; (4) Education, training and awareness.

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).⁶ The second step, foreseen in the Strategy, is the development and implementation of Action Plans and of other measures affecting the policy areas concerned. The sectoral Action Plans define concrete actions and measures to meet the objectives defined in the strategy, and specify measurable targets. The present Communication establishes how to identify appropriate indicators for monitoring and evaluating performance in the implementation of actions and measures envisaged and their effectiveness.

8. This Communication presents four specific "sectoral" Biodiversity Action Plans on
 - Conservation of Natural Resources
 - Agriculture
 - Fisheries
 - Economic and Development Co-operation.
9. As announced in the Strategy, development of the Action Plans has been led by the Commission services responsible for the policy areas concerned. They worked in close co-ordination with each other and with those overseeing biodiversity policy, as well as with the European Environment Agency and Member State experts. Following the spirit of the Aarhus Convention,⁷ NGOs and other stakeholders have participated in the drafting process from its very early stages.
10. The Action Plans have been developed in the light of the specific instruments and procedures which apply to these sectoral policies. Thus the structure of the Action Plans is not identical but reflects the particular policy framework of each sector.
11. Inevitably there is overlap between the Action Plans since the different policy areas at which they are targeted impinge on each other. Thus coherent and co-ordinated implementation will be crucial.

2. BROADER POLICY CONTEXT

12. The development and implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy and its Action Plans (BAPs) must be seen in the wider context of the European Union commitment to achieve sustainable development and to integrate environmental concerns into other sectors and policy areas in accordance with articles 2, 3 and 6 of the EC Treaty. BAPs will also be important for furthering the process of policy reform initiated by AGENDA 2000.
13. The European Council is committed to develop a Sustainable Development Strategy to be presented in 2001 at the Göteborg Summit. In turn this will influence the European Union position for the major international meeting in 2002 to mark ten years after the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. The European Union Sustainable Development Strategy will address the economic,

⁶ Council Decision of 25 October 1993 concerning the conclusion of the Convention on Biological Diversity. OJ L 309 ; 13.12.93

⁷ UN/ECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

social and environmental aspects of sustainability which, as argued above, all have links with biodiversity.

14. The Biodiversity Strategy and its Action Plans focus on the integration of biodiversity concerns into different sectoral policies. They therefore support the policy integration process initiated in the Cardiff European Council by identifying the specific instruments and actions needed to reverse the current downward trend.
15. The forthcoming 6th Environmental Action Programme will identify nature and biodiversity as a priority theme for future action. It will build on and enhance the Biodiversity Strategy and the Action Plans.
16. Central and Eastern Europe is rich in biodiversity preserved in many cases by traditional land use practices and threatened in other cases by inadequate economic development. Preserving biodiversity requires regional co-operation, and developing the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy should provide a forum to enhance regional co-ordination in the implementation of relevant Decisions of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD.
17. With the accession of new countries the European Union will increase its biodiversity assets. The implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans and the complementarity of the National Biodiversity Strategies in these countries will help to preserve their rich biodiversity by ensuring adequate policy integration.

3. THE SCOPE OF THE ACTION PLANS

18. The Biodiversity Action Plan on Conservation of Natural Resources aims to ensure that existing and planned environmental legislation and instruments are used to their full potential in order to achieve the relevant objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy.
19. The preservation of some species and habitats is cause for particular concern. They require specific measures such as the legal protection of flora and fauna and/or the places where they occur. Therefore, the Action Plan aims to bring habitats and species of Community interest to a satisfactory conservation status by fully implementing the Birds and Habitats Directives and by providing adequate financial and technical support for the conservation and sustainable use of areas designated under this legislation.
20. Since the preservation of biodiversity requires action not only within designated areas and for protected species, the Action Plan also sets out policy priorities for helping to preserve biodiversity across the whole territory. Thus, the Action Plan defines means of addressing biodiversity concerns using non biodiversity-specific instruments such as the water framework directive, the strategy for integrated coastal zone management, environmental impact assessment, environmental liability, eco-labeling, eco-audit and other economic instruments. Alien invasive species and certain GMOs may also affect biodiversity in the wider environment and therefore these issues are also addressed in the Action Plan. As ex-situ conservation can play a valuable role in the framework of co-ordinated re-introduction or integrated conservation schemes, the Action Plan identifies priorities regarding zoos and botanic gardens.

21. However all these initiatives, while important, will not be enough by themselves to preserve biodiversity across the whole territory. Changes in land use practices are among the main causes of biodiversity loss and their underlying causes stem from the way certain sectoral policies are developed and implemented. It is therefore essential to complement the specific initiatives mentioned in the previous paragraphs with the integration of biodiversity into the main policies on land and sea use (i.e. agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture and forestry). As a result, the Action Plan indicates specific environment initiatives for monitoring and assessing the overall effects on biodiversity from integration efforts in these sectors.
22. Finally, the BAP on Conservation of Natural Resources focuses on enhancing opportunities and synergies with relevant international agreements and processes, in particular, the CITES, Climate Change, Desertification, Barcelona and OSPAR Conventions, the Cartagena and Montreal Protocols, WTO/TRIPS, FAO and the international process on forests. Coherence in their development and implementation is needed to prevent potential threats to and maximise benefits for biodiversity.
23. The Biodiversity Action Plan on Agriculture starts with an analysis of the interrelations between agriculture and biological diversity, focusing on both the reciprocal benefits and the negative effects on biodiversity of farming activities. This analysis results in seven priorities for actions: (a) ensuring a reasoned intensification in agricultural practices, (b) maintaining an economically viable and socially acceptable agricultural activity, in particular in biodiversity-rich areas, where these activities have been weakened, (c) using the potential of agri-environmental measures for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, (d) ensuring the existence of an ecological infrastructure at the level of the whole territory, (e) supporting actions aimed at the enhancement of genetic diversity in agriculture and at the maintenance of local and traditional varieties and breeds, (f) encouraging the marketing of landraces and varieties that are naturally adapted to the local and regional conditions, (g) preventing the abundance and spreading of non-native species.
24. Based on the experience gained with agri-environmental measures, five essential guiding principles for devising the Action Plan are identified: (a) production methods may affect biodiversity conservation, (b) while action should be taken throughout the whole territory, intervention methods or tools should be tailored to local specific conditions, (c) a decentralised approach should be favoured, where Member States are responsible for the choice and implementation of appropriate measures, (d) priority should be given to a systematic and co-ordinated approach, based on complementary of Community and national instruments, as well as of environmental and agricultural policy instruments, (e) co-ordination should be ensured among the various Community sources of funding.
25. Within this conceptual framework of priorities and principles, core instruments relevant to the achievement of both sectoral and horizontal objectives identified by the European Biodiversity Strategy, are proposed: (1) the so-called “horizontal” Regulation and in particular its Article 3 (“*environmental protection requirements*”), (2) the agri-environmental measures under the Rural Development Regulation, (3) the other measures provided by the Rural Development Regulation, (4) the environmental components of Common Market Organisations, (5) the Regulation on genetic resources in agriculture and, finally, (6) the environmental components of market related instruments, concerning the quality policy. Attention is also given to

other instruments, such as the legislation on Plant Protection Products and SAPARD. Finally, the Action Plan indicates specific targets and a timetable for achieving the priorities identified. The effectiveness of the Action Plan depends on the appropriate implementation by the Member States of all of these instruments. A priority task for monitoring and evaluating the different integration components is the development of operational agri-environmental indicators, permitting a better understanding of the complex relationships between agriculture and the environment.

26. The Biodiversity Action Plan on Fisheries identifies coherent measures aiming to preserve or rehabilitate biodiversity where it is under threat due to fisheries and aquaculture activities.
27. 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 and 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 the strengthening of research and monitoring. For aquaculture, measures seek to reduce the environmental impact of aquaculture, limit the introduction of alien invasive species, secure animal health and strengthen research to enhance knowledge in this area. Continuous research and monitoring will be crucial to the success of the measures identified in the Action Plan.
28. The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), which is based on scientific advice, has begun to integrate the environmental dimension. The 2002 CFP review provides an excellent opportunity to introduce new or strengthen existing measures and the proposed actions under this Action Plan will contribute to that process.
29. The Biodiversity Action Plan on Economic and Development Co-operation should be seen in the context of the International Development Targets agreed for 2015. Among them, the reduction of poverty and reversing the trends in environmental degradation and natural resource loss are closely linked to biodiversity. Furthermore, development co-operation instruments are particularly relevant for achieving the CBD objectives regarding the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.
30. The Action Plan points to the need for improved links with EU Member States and international development co-operation agencies, programmes and institutions in the Member States and at international level (e.g. World Bank and GEF). It also considers the need for building up capacity to manage development and environment issues within the Commission.
31. The Action Plan lists '*guiding principles*' that need to be followed (including the ecosystem approach, stakeholder participation, and integration into wider policy frameworks) and sets out the actions to be taken in 3 inter-linked contexts:
 - a) in intensive production systems (agriculture, livestock, aquaculture, tree plantations, etc), with attention to their life-support functions and services, maintenance of genetic biodiversity, and caution regarding alien invasive species and living modified organisms;
 - b) 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;

- c) in protected areas, where stronger links are needed between conservation action and sustainable development strategies.
32. 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.

4. TOWARDS A TRANSPARENT AND TARGETED MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

33. The implementation of the Action Plans must address some crosscutting issues in order to measure effects on the ground. These include methods to interlink monitoring of the implementation of the Action Plans and measuring their success by identifying a set of indicators to assess their performance. Pulling together relevant information, using it as a basis for reporting and making it accessible to the public is equally important. Finally, research will be needed for implementing some activities and this will be developed through relevant Community programmes.

4.1. Indicators

34. The Biodiversity Strategy says that, “*each Action Plan should as a general rule set out clear tasks, targets and mechanisms to assess their performance and to evaluate progress in the implementation of the strategy. The Commission will in co-operation with relevant bodies identify indicators in order to enable an evaluation ex ante and ex post of the implementation of the Action Plans. Species and ecosystems likely to be affected by each policy area mentioned in section III, and for which action is needed to ensure their conservation and sustainable use, will be the basis for the establishment of indicators. Economic indicators will also be considered*”.

35. The development of indicators for assessing the performance of the Biodiversity Strategy and the Action Plans calls for a two-level approach:

a) Indicators for specific policy instruments and initiatives. Indicators need to be identified to link the trends in the status of species and ecosystems with individual Community actions and their implementation at Member State level.

b) Headline indicators. There is also a need for indicators to assess the overall effectiveness of the Community Biodiversity Strategy and its Action Plans.

36. During the last two years, the Commission, the European Environment Agency, Member States and relevant international organisations have devoted considerable efforts to these two areas. However, the current state of knowledge does not yet allow one to come up with a precise set of meaningful biodiversity indicators for many of the elements considered in the Action Plans. The Report from the Commission to the Helsinki Summit provides detailed information on the state of the art and on-going activities regarding indicators.

37. The difficulties in setting monitoring and assessment baselines result mainly from the fact that the characteristics of biodiversity and the effects of policies differ across the Community. Consequently, appropriate indicators should be based on a bio-

geographical approach. This requires indicators to be identified at local level, yet the information they provide should be comparable. In order to identify indicators which meet these exacting requirement the Commission envisages:

- Developing an analytical framework for identifying indicators;
- Identifying, in collaboration with Member States, a set of criteria for the selection of priority indicators;
- Inviting Member States to submit proposals, in line with the analytical framework and criteria, for biodiversity indicators to assess the performance of each action of the Action Plans and measures for other relevant policy instruments vis à vis their local biodiversity;
- Establishing an integrated information system for the Biodiversity Strategy and its Action Plans in the light of scientific advice and the proposals submitted by Member States.

38. The development of indicators for forests will take into account the work of the Working Group on "Biodiversity, Protected Areas and Related Issues" of the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe and its work on identifying indicators for assessing biodiversity of forest ecosystems.

39. In the case of the Action Plan on Economic and Development Co-operation a similar approach should be followed, by inviting our partner countries to provide the necessary information.

40. The Commission will establish a set of biodiversity indicators as soon as the necessary information is available. Thereafter, the European Environment Agency, or where appropriate other relevant institutions, will define the mechanisms required for monitoring such indicators. The Second Report to the Council and the Parliament on the Implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy, due in 2003, will focus on the establishment and monitoring of indicators.

4.2. Exchange of information.

41. The European Community is committed to facilitating public access to information relevant to biodiversity. This includes information on sectoral policies and instruments considered in the Action Plans. The European Community Clearing House Mechanism under the Convention on Biological Diversity (EC-CHM)⁸, whose pilot phase was launched on 8 June 2000, is a one-stop-shop for such information. It offers, in particular, information on policies, legislation, funding opportunities, databases, sources of expertise, etc held by European Community institutions and has links to other institutions and organisations (governmental, private and NGOs). It also links to web sites of global organisations such as the CBD Secretariat. It is an important tool for promoting and facilitating scientific and technological co-operation not only within Europe but also with countries around the world, especially with developing countries.

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<http://biodiversity-chm.eea.eu.int>

42. It is important to consolidate and build upon this facility, in particular there is a need to encourage the consolidation of information gathering methods, and to allow more user interactions and geographical retrieval mechanisms. It is also important for the Community to use its unique role to encourage a European co-ordination forum for Biodiversity CHMs and to enhance co-operation between the EC-CHM and other Clearing House Mechanisms established in Europe.

4.3. Research

43. The objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy set a general policy framework for furthering Community research on biodiversity. This was subsequently incorporated into the Fifth Framework Programme on Research and Development. As the general objectives in different sections of the Strategy are now being translated into more specific actions, research initiatives should respond by sharpening their focus. The Commission is in the process of identifying research needs emerging from the different Action Plans and the other initiatives arising from the Biodiversity Strategy. This will enable biodiversity issues to be properly addressed in the forthcoming Sixth Framework Programme on Research and Development.

5. FOLLOW-UP

44. The First Report to the CBD on the Implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity by the European Community⁹ provides an account of Community policies, legislation and other instruments in place when the Biodiversity Strategy was adopted. Since then, a substantial number of new Community initiatives relevant for achieving the objectives of the Strategy have been developed. An up-to-date picture will be provided in the First Report to the Council and to the Parliament on the Implementation of the Community Biodiversity Strategy.
45. Implementing the Biodiversity Strategy and, in particular, its Action Plans requires close co-ordination between the services of the Commission directly responsible for or relevant to the policy areas concerned. An Inter-service Group on Biodiversity ensures this co-ordination. In implementing the Action Plans all necessary Community funds will be provided for under existing programmes.
46. Finally, successful implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy and its Action Plans depends, to a large degree, 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** with a mandate to share information and promote the complementarity of actions taken at Community and Member State levels. Given the important role of NGOs, industry, producer associations and other civil society stakeholders in this area, the Commission envisages inviting representatives of these groups to participate in meetings of this Expert Committee as observers.
47. The Commission will prepare by 2002, a study on complementarity in the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity by the European Community and its Member States.

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SEC (1998) 0398