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Put resource use at the heart of biodiversity policy

Response to the Commission's Communication „Options for an EU vision and target for biodiversity beyond 2010" and recommendations for the post 2010 Biodiversity Strategy

CEEweb welcomes the Commission Communication[1] discussing options for an EU vision and target for biodiversity beyond 2010. The Communication correctly outlines the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem services for the economy and human well-being and makes the urgency of the case evident. In special, we welcome the Commission's support for the establishment of an Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and the proposal on Green Infrastructure. Unfortunately the other policies proposed do not match to the urgency of the matter and are not proportionate to the importance of conserving biodiversity. Regarding the proposed headline targets for 2020 we call the European Parliament and the European Council to adopt the most ambitious target (Option 4.) to demonstrate commitment for biodiversity conservation in the next decade.

In order to formulate really effective biodiversity policies for the coming decade, we urge the Commission, the Parliament and the Council to rethink the policy proposals put forward by the Commission for the post 2010 period. We think the Commission's assessment on why the current biodiversity target has been failed is inadequate and consequently, the policies proposed for the post 2010 period that respond to this assessment are also insufficient. We believe that with this approach the EC is now missing a historical chance to change the course of biodiversity policy making in Europe and to develop truly effective policies that will stop biodiversity loss.

It is clear from the Communication that the EU is not prepared to make the necessary rethinking but is about to follow the failed approach of the last decade with some moderate modifications. While the proposed policies for the 2010-2020 period could bring significant improvement in the state of biodiversity at their current strategy these policies cannot be considered as effective tools to sincerely halt the loss of biodiversity in Europe.

Tackling the root causes will enhance implementation of biodiversity policies

The underlying drivers of biodiversity loss are the unsustainable consumption and production practices that are affordable through the unlimited flow of cheap natural resources and non-renewable energies. These structural drivers, which operate our economy are determined and underpinned by the institutional drivers, namely the economic and legal regulations, the institutional systems, policies, budgets and education. The structural and institutional drivers are generated according to the values of society which currently prefer material values to nature, health, good human relationships and other non-materialistic values. CEEweb has already highlighted the complex relationships between the underlying indirect drivers, pressures, state and impacts of biodiversity loss in its assessment of the BAP Mid-term review[2].

The drivers of biodiversity loss are our unsustainable consumption and production practices that are affordable through the unlimited flow of cheap natural resources and non-renewable energies into economy.

[1] COM(2010) 4/4
[2] Assessing the EU BAP and its implementation – A failure of delivery or a failure of approach? CEEweb, 2009

Insufficient implementation of biodiversity policies, inadequate financing and policy integration, or gaps in policy and in our knowledge of biodiversity – the main impediments highlighted by the Communication – are just some of the consequences of the drivers. Targeting those means not more than giving end-of-pipe solutions to the problem or with other words treating only the symptoms, but not the illness itself. We believe these attempts are condemned to fail because the unchanged drivers constantly generate environmental pressures, thus hinder the adequate realisation of the current biodiversity approaches. Designing and implementing new policies (for Invasive Alien Species or for Soil) is also only useful if the sectors don't have obvious contradictory interests with their implementation. Investing in knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services is important, in special if it helps to reveal the interlinkages between the socio-economic drivers and biodiversity loss. Compared to the 2006 Biodiversity Communication and Action Plan (BAP)[3] we see that many of the problems highlighted there are still not tackled. Nevertheless the policies proposed by the current Communication are similar or the same.

Integration of biodiversity considerations into, for example, fisheries policies will yield limited success as long as the main driver of fishery remains a constantly increasing catch.

With largely unchanged policy directions the EU won't succeed in achieving real break-through in the field of biodiversity.

Resource use, production and consumption and biodiversity loss are inherently interlinked

Biodiversity loss can be stopped only when the root causes are changed. The European Union won't be able to conserve the ecological basis without tackling its unsustainable use of natural resources. Efforts towards this goal could be supported by the current favourable political and economic climate. The 2008 economic crisis has changed our perception of the prevailing economic model and many renowned scientists, politicians and Nobel Prize laureates call for a change in the measurement of well-being[4] or for significant investment into a green economy[5].

The debates around the economic crisis and the looming ecological crisis could be a starting point for discussions on reduced resource use and a corresponding new economic framework.

Also, scientific evidence is growing about that we have not only disturbed the climate stability of Earth but are nearing the boundaries of the planet in other aspects, as well. In a 2009 article of Nature[6], Johan Rockström argues that summing up humanity's global impact we have transgressed safe limits in the use of biodiversity, nitrogen load and climate, at the same time we are close to safe limits with phosphorus load, ocean acidification and freshwater and land use. A 2009 assessment of the Global Footprint Network shows that if all people lived and consumed like Europeans we would need 2,6 planets. Europe needs to curb this huge overshoot if it wants to preserve biodiversity.

We call the Commission to consider the issue of reduced resource and energy use as one key issue to be addressed by post 2010 biodiversity policies. This should be considered equally important to the issues of implementation, financing, integration, policy gaps, knowledge base and equity.

Reduced resource and energy use should be one key issue to be addressed by post 2010 biodiversity policies

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[3] COM(2006) 216 final
[4] Report by the „Stiglitz Commission" June 2009
[5] UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on the Poznan Climate Change Conference, 11 December 2008
[6] A safe operating space for humanity, Johan Rockström et al., *Nature* 461, 472-475 (24 September 2009)

CEEweb's recommendations for post 2010 biodiversity policies

2010 provides a good opportunity to point out that biodiversity loss is first and foremost the consequence of the exponentially increasing consumption and production that is based on unlimited energy- and material input. Thus it is the responsibility of biodiversity policy makers to state this without further delay *inter alia* in order not to misguide policy making in other fields.

RECOMMENDATION 1. Use the International Biodiversity Year to start discussion on the interlinkages between resource use, production and consumption and biodiversity loss.

The Commission should lead the debate on how unsustainable resource use could be tackled through economic, resource, biodiversity and other policies and tools. An inter-sectoral working group comprising experts of different DGs should be set up to analyse the interlinkages between biodiversity loss, other environmental problems (such as climate change or soil degradation) and the current economic framework and resource use in Europe. It would be preferable to introduce caps in different fields, e.g. for land use, emissions, use of renewable resources etc. parallel. It is important to start this debate now to familiarise sectors and stakeholders with the concepts of natural boundaries, capped economy; and how sectors and stakeholders can contribute to operate within the carrying capacity of Earth.

RECOMMENDATION 2. Put an absolute limit on total energy use (e.g. 20% reduction by 2020) to be reach gradually (e.g. by 2% per year).

Put an absolute limit on natural resource use (reduction of EU footprint by 25% until 2020) which limit then could be reached gradually, e.g. by 2-3% per year.

Applying input side regulation to the economy is the only effective way to decrease total environmental pressure. This would create the right balance between the use of natural resources and human labour in the production process, and thus contribute to achieving full employment. This would shift the production and consumption patterns towards less energy- and material-intensive products and services, and positively change the values of society by making people appreciate natural resources more, including healthy ecosystems. As production and consumption patterns fundamentally change, the sustainable use of biodiversity, including the management of Natura 2000 sites spontaneously becomes more profitable for the land owners. Similarly, this would make a substantial contribution both to improving the coherence of ecosystems as well as to limiting pollution and the spread of invasive alien species and use of GMOs, by creating an enabling socio-economic environment for effective policies and legal regulation in those fields. Reduced energy- and resource use is also the only way to effectively fight global warming and to help humanity adapt and mitigate climate change.

Work out sectoral resource- and energy-reduction targets corresponding to the overall EU targets.

We recommend defining caps/limits for energy- and resource use on European level and use the 'caps and quotas' system to reach the goals. Sectors could be involved through the definition of sectoral sub-targets corresponding to the overall European targets. Tools for the measurement of energy- and resource use in Europe should be enhanced. The Commission should argue for the use of such targets on international level and in other policy processes, as well (Budget review, Mexico climate round, 7th EAP, CBD Strategic Plan review)

RECOMMENDATION 3. Improve the coherence and connectivity of natural ecosystems.

As the status of biodiversity is largely determined by the spatial structure of ecosystems, effective land use policy that can ensure the coherence and connectivity is indispensable for biodiversity conservation. Healthy, functioning ecological networks are also important to strengthen the adaptive

capacity of ecosystems in the face of climate change. Currently there is no coherent ecological network in Europe, on the contrary, man made infrastructures form a coherent network of roads, rails, pipelines, etc. This needs to be changed, but largely not through the designation of further protected areas. Legally protected areas and ecological networks alone are not likely to be sufficient for halting biodiversity loss or to help us adapt to climate change. For that more is needed: our landscapes as a whole should remain or become biodiversity- and climate-friendly. A mosaic-like, diverse and coherent landscape providing various connections between locations of natural habitats is the most viable for people and nature alike, and the most resilient for any kind of disturbance. Thus that is how man-dominated landscapes also need to look like. In this context we welcome the Commissions intention to start with a Green Infrastructure strategy. Furthermore to the ideas discussed so far we recommend the Green Infrastructure strategy to include the followings:

- rehabilitate natural surface cover on significant part of man-dominated land with a gradual timing
- implement measures of spatial planning and land use that is strengthening the resilience and adaptive capacity of ecosystems, e.g. rationalize the current man-made infrastructure which fragments ecosystems; set limits and scientific sound criteria for green-field investments
- re-structure payments in agriculture and forestry so that instead of favouring intensive farming methods they provide subsidies to the owners of land according to their biodiversity richness in terms of ecosystem services
- reformed agricultural policy should set limits and scientific criteria for the cultivated fields size which should be separated by semi-natural habitats on a compulsory basis in all kinds of agricultural landscapes

Rehabilitate natural surface cover on significant part of man-dominated land; implement measures of spatial planning and land use; rationalize the current man-made infrastructure and set limits for the cultivated field size.

Enhance subsidies according to biodiversity richness and ecosystem services provided by the land.

The quality of the state of the environment and thus ecosystems needs to be ensured limiting emissions to it through strict legal regulations, which first of all aim for prevention (through controlling the intentional and unintentional spread of invasive alien species, maintaining the integrity of ecosystems, giving up the use of GMOs and controlling the production of chemicals and other pollutants) and which apply control the eradication of complementary measures. Therefore we recommend that the upcoming Strategy calls for the expansion of the EU chemicals policy in order to address the total pressure from pollution and calls for the giving up of the idea of GMOs, as a false solution to social and ecological challenges.

RECOMMENDATION 4. Effectively control the total environmental pressure originating from pollution and biological agents.

CEEweb calls the Commission to consider the above recommendations during the development of the new EU Biodiversity Strategy as well as other biodiversity and sectoral policies under development. Furthermore we support the Commission to represent these points on the global level in respective fora e.g. within the framework of the CBD, WTO, as global solutions are needed for global biodiversity.

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CEEweb for Biodiversity is a network of non-governmental organizations in the Central and Eastern European region. Our mission is the conservation of biodiversity through the promotion of sustainable development.