

Implementing the Biodiversity Convention in the EU: a challenge for policy integration

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1. Introduction

During the last decades, reduction and losses of biodiversity have accelerated dramatically. Existing measures have proved to be insufficient to reverse the present trends. The underlying causes of this problem stem from the design and implementation of a number of sectoral and horizontal policies.

In order to address this problem, the European Commission adopted on 4 February 1998 a 'Communication to the Council and to the Parliament on a European Community Biodiversity Strategy' [COM (1998) 42]. This Strategy defines the priority Community objectives for preserving biodiversity and announces the process and methodology that will be followed to attain these objectives.

Overall, the Strategy aims 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.

In March 2001 the European Commission adopted a second Communication to the Council and the European Parliament including specific sectoral 'Biodiversity Action Plans in the areas of Conservation of Natural Resources, Agriculture, Fisheries and Development and Economic Co-operation' [COM (2001) 162].

With the adoption of this framework Biodiversity Strategy and the specific Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP), the Commission made the necessary steps towards implementing the most important obligation of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), of which the Community is a Party.

These Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans should also be seen as key instruments for achieving the target of halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 set in the EU Sustainable Development Strategy.

2. The EU Biodiversity Strategy

The Strategy defines a framework for actions in relevant Community policy areas to achieve integration of biodiversity concerns. This initiative can also be seen as a model for the integration of environmental policies in key areas of Union activity.

The implementation of the CBD by the Community calls for a two-step process. The adoption of the Strategy containing the general policy orientations was the first step. The second is the development and implementation of Action Plans and other measures by the European Commission's services responsible for the policy areas concerned.

The Strategy thereby defined how biodiversity concerns are being taken into account, or will be integrated, *inter alia*, in the implementation of arrangements for the Structural Funds, the Common Agriculture Policy and its future reforms, the forthcoming reform of the Common Fisheries Policy and in the development and implementation of development aid policies.

The Strategy sets 46 objectives in the four central horizontal areas set out in the CBD:

- 1) conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity;
- 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.

These include the recognition that one of the major gaps in existing Community conservation policies concerns the impacts of relevant sectoral policy areas on biodiversity across the rest of the territory outside protected areas.

Among the main objectives identified are the promotion of labelling schemes based on life cycle analysis for products whose production, distribution, use or disposal could affect biodiversity; the attention to the social and economic viability of systems supporting biodiversity; and the removal of incentives with perverse effects on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The Strategy suggests the estab-

lishment of a network of European centres of excellence in biodiversity research and stresses the need for identifying a set of indicators to assess how biodiversity is affected by the sectors and to assess progress in the implementation of the Strategy.

The Community Biodiversity Strategy then focuses more 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 transports;
- tourism;
- development and economic cooperation.

It sets out 55 sectoral objectives that these policy areas must attain. It announced the development of specific Action Plans for some of these sectors.

3. The European Community Biodiversity Action Plans

In line with the Community Biodiversity Strategy, the European Commission adopted in 2001 a Communication to the Council and the European Parliament including detailed 'Biodiversity Action Plans in the areas of Conservation of Natural Resources, Agriculture, Fisheries, and Development and Economic Co-operation [COM (2001) 162]'.

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.

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.

Since the preservation of biodiversity requires action not only within designated areas and for protected species, the Action Plan also sets out policy priorities to help 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-labelling, 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 frame-

work of co-ordinated re-introduction or integrated conservation schemes, the Action Plan identifies priorities regarding zoos and botanic gardens.

However all these initiatives, while important, will not be sufficient 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.

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.

The Biodiversity Action Plan on Agriculture starts with an analysis of the interrelationships between agriculture and biological diversity, focusing on both the reciprocal benefits and the negative effects of farming activities on biodiversity. This analysis results in seven priorities for actions:

- 1) ensuring a reasoned intensification in agricultural practices;
- 2) maintaining an economically viable and socially acceptable agricultural activity, in particular in biodiversity-rich areas, where these activities have been weakened;
- 3) using the potential of agri-environmental measures for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity;
- 4) ensuring the existence of an ecological infrastructure at the level of the whole territory;
- 5) supporting actions aimed at the enhancement of genetic diversity in agriculture and at the maintenance of local and traditional varieties and breeds;
- 6) encouraging the marketing of landraces and varieties that are naturally adapted to the local and regional conditions;
- 7) preventing the abundance and spreading of non-native species.

Based on the experience gained with agri-environmental measures, five essential guiding principles for devising the Action Plan are identified:

- 1) production methods may affect biodiversity conservation;
- 2) while action should be taken throughout the whole territory, intervention methods or tools should be tailored to local specific conditions;
- 3) a decentralised approach should be favoured, where Member States are responsible for the choice and implementation of appropriate measures;

- 4) 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;
- 5) co-ordination should be ensured among the various Community sources of funding.

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:

- the so-called 'horizontal' Regulation and in particular its Article 3 ('environmental protection requirements');
- the agri-environmental measures under the Rural Development Regulation;
- the other measures provided by the Rural Development Regulation;
- the environmental components of Common Market Organisations;
- the Regulation on genetic resources in agriculture;
- 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.

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.

The measures in this short to medium term Action Plan have been identified at three levels:

- 1) the conservation and sustainable use of fish stocks;
- 2) the protection of non-target species, habitats and ecosystems from fishing activities;
- 3) preventing aquaculture from 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.

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 oppor-

tunity to introduce new measures or strengthen existing ones, and the proposed actions under this Action Plan will contribute to that process.

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, reversing the trends in environmental degradation and natural resource loss and the reduction of poverty are closely linked to biodiversity. Furthermore, development co-operation instruments are particularly relevant to achieve the CBD objectives regarding the equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.

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. the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility). 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 (including the ecosystem approach, stakeholder participation, and integration into wider policy frameworks) and sets out the actions to be taken in three inter-linked contexts:

- 1) 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;
- 2) 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;
- 3) in protected areas, where stronger links are needed between conservation action and sustainable development strategies.

The Action 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. Next steps

Progress in the implementation of the Strategy and the performance of the Action Plans and other measures will be monitored and assessed using biodiversity indicators and measurable targets. This will also provide guidance as to further actions needed.

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