

Question time: Raising EU ambition on biodiversity ahead of COP 15

Parliament will use its powers of oversight in the revived 'question time' set for the July plenary session to question the Commission on the EU's level of ambition ahead of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, the main international instrument on biodiversity protection. On 22 June 2022, the European Commission tabled two core legislative proposals under the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030: an EU nature restoration law, and new rules for the sustainable use of pesticides. The strategy represents the EU's contribution to the international negotiations on the global post-2020 biodiversity framework, expected to be adopted at COP 15.

Background

Biodiversity – the diversity of life on Earth – delivers services that are essential to human life, such as food, fuel and medicines; crop pollination; climate regulation; water and air filtration; and disaster risk mitigation. Nature is, however, under intense pressure, with most indicators on ecosystems and biodiversity worldwide showing [rapid decline](#). The main drivers of biodiversity loss are land- and sea-use change, over-exploitation of natural resources, climate change, pollution, and invasion of alien species.

At their 15th meeting, the 196 parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, including the EU and its Member States, are set to agree on a new global biodiversity framework, with conservation and restoration goals for the next 10 years. None of the 20 [biodiversity targets](#) adopted by the international community for the last decade were fully met, and efforts need to be stepped up to put an end to nature's alarming decline. [Recent analyses](#), referred to in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report of February 2022, indicate that maintaining the resilience of biodiversity and ecosystem services globally would require effective and equitable conservation of around 30 % to 50 % of Earth's land, freshwater and ocean areas, including currently near-natural ecosystems. In a [June 2022](#) study, scientists estimated that to safeguard biodiversity, at least 44 % of the Earth's terrestrial area would require conservation attention (ranging from protected areas to land-use policies), with significant geographic variation, which is largely a reflection of biodiversity distribution.

Chaired by China, COP 15, initially planned for October 2020, was delayed several times on account of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is now scheduled to take place in Montreal, Canada, from [5 to 17 December 2022](#). In March 2022, governments met for 15 days of [negotiations in Geneva](#), to advance on developing the global framework, the [first draft](#) of which had been released in July 2021. [Specific issues](#) emerged around additional financing requests, in particular. Negotiators met again from 21 to 26 June 2022 in Nairobi, Kenya.

Biodiversity protection in the EU

The EU framework for nature protection is based on two main pieces of legislation, the [Birds Directive](#) and the [Habitats Directive](#). They seek to ensure the conservation of species and habitat types of EU importance and provide the basis for the [Natura 2000](#) network of protected areas. Freshwater and marine ecosystems are subject to specific protection measures under the [Water Framework Directive](#) and the [Marine Strategy Framework Directive](#), aiming to restore these ecosystems to a good condition. These instruments are complemented by legislation addressing specific pressures, such as pollution from nutrients and/or other chemicals from agriculture, households and industry, or marine litter. A specific [regulation](#) addresses the adverse impact of invasive alien species on native biodiversity. Despite this legal framework and a number of strategies and action plans, the European Environment Agency's [2020 assessment](#) on the state of nature shows that the overall picture remains bleak, with most protected species and habitats found to have an unfavourable conservation status.



A core element of the European Green Deal, the [EU biodiversity strategy for 2030](#), adopted in May 2020, contains over a hundred actions, commitments and targets. Measures proposed include: enlarging the current network of legally protected areas to cover at least 30 % of the EU's land area and 30 % of the EU's seas, with at least a third under strict protection; setting legally binding EU nature restoration targets to restore degraded ecosystems; reducing the use and risk of pesticides; and putting in place a new European biodiversity governance framework, to steer the implementation of biodiversity commitments at different levels, with a monitoring and review mechanism. The strategy is also aimed at stepping up implementation and enforcement of EU environmental legislation, and mobilising €20 billion a year for biodiversity through various sources, including EU funds, national and private funding. At international level, mirroring its approach in the fight against climate change, the EU will lead by example in the negotiations on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. It will push for global 2030 targets in line with those set out in the 2030 biodiversity strategy, and for a much stronger implementation, monitoring and review process.

Delivery on commitments

The monitoring, reporting and review mechanism set up by the Commission as part of the new biodiversity [governance framework](#) announced in the EU biodiversity strategy includes an [actions tracker](#) and a [dashboard](#) to follow progress towards the 2030 quantified targets. At the time of writing, almost a quarter of the actions envisaged by the EU biodiversity strategy have been completed. These include, for instance, the publication of the EU [forest](#) and [soil](#) strategies for 2030; and the presentation of legislative proposals such as the [regulation on deforestation-free products](#) and the [directive](#) on corporate sustainability due diligence, currently under consideration by the co-legislators.

On 22 June 2022, a few months later than planned, the European Commission [tabled](#) two core pieces of the biodiversity strategy. The proposal for a [nature restoration law](#) sets multiple binding restoration targets and obligations across a wide range of ecosystems, from forests and agricultural land to urban areas, rivers and marine habitats, complementing existing legislation. These nature restoration measures should cover at least 20 % of the EU's land and sea areas by 2030, and all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050. To implement the proposed regulation, Member States would be required to develop nature restoration plans, to be assessed by the Commission. The proposed nature restoration law entails a specific objective to reverse the decline of pollinator populations by 2030.

The [proposal](#) for a regulation on the sustainable use of pesticides, which would replace [Directive 2009/128/EC](#), sets legally binding targets at EU level to reduce by 50 % the use and the risk of chemical pesticides as well as the use of the more hazardous pesticides by 2030, in line with the [EU's 'farm to fork' strategy](#). To reach the EU-wide target collectively, Member States would have some flexibility in setting their own binding national reduction targets within defined parameters, allowing account to be taken of national situations, including historical progress and intensity of pesticide use. The proposal would ban the use of all pesticides in sensitive areas (and within three metres of those areas).

European Parliament position

The European Parliament [strongly supports](#) the target of protecting at least 30 % of the EU's marine and terrestrial areas, which should be binding and implemented in line with science-based criteria and biodiversity needs. Parliament has welcomed the Commission's commitment on setting binding restoration targets, calling for an overall restoration target of at least 30 % of the EU's land and seas, together with ecosystem-, habitat- and species-specific targets at EU and Member State levels. The Parliament has also called on the Commission to submit in 2022 a proposal for a legally binding biodiversity governance framework, following a comprehensive impact assessment. This 'biodiversity law' should steer a path to 2050 with a set of objectives, including targets for 2030 and the COP 15 commitments, and should establish a monitoring mechanism with appropriate indicators, within and beyond protected areas. To protect pollinators, Parliament has advocated the [inclusion](#) of EU-wide mandatory pesticide reduction targets in the revised sustainable use of pesticides directive, following an appropriate impact assessment. It has also [called](#) for a pollinator restoration target.