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## BIODIVERSITY, LAND USE AND FORESTRY

The EU has played an important role at international level in seeking solutions to biodiversity loss, deforestation and climate change. The 1992 UN Conference on the Environment and Development marked a major step forward with the adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change notes the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems and the protection of biodiversity. As part of the European Green Deal, the Commission proposed a new biodiversity strategy that aims to put Europe's biodiversity on the path to recovery by 2030. It includes a nature restoration law to restore damaged ecosystems and bring nature back across Europe.

### LEGAL BASIS

Articles 3, 11 and 191-193 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

### GENERAL BACKGROUND

The UN Conference on the Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, led to the adoption of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), as well as to the Rio Declaration, a Statement of Forest Principles and the Agenda 21 programme. The CBD is complemented by two major protocols: the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, which was adopted in 2000 and entered into force in 2003, seeks to protect biodiversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology; the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing, which was adopted in 2010 and entered into force in 2014, aims to create greater legal certainty and transparency for both providers and users of genetic resources. However, the CBD's report entitled 'The Global Biodiversity Outlook 3' shows that the 2010 biodiversity target was not met. In 2010 in Nagoya (Aichi Prefecture, Japan), the Parties to the CBD also adopted a revised strategic plan incorporating the Aichi Biodiversity Targets: 20 ambitious targets organised in five strategic goals to achieve biodiversity protection by 2020, as part of a strategic biodiversity plan for the 2011-2020 period.

The EU is also a party to the following conventions: the Ramsar Convention on the Conservation of Wetlands (February 1971); the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (March 1973); the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (June 1979); the Bern Convention on the Protection of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (1982); the Rio de Janeiro CBD (June 1992); and the following regional conventions:



the Helsinki Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (1974); the Barcelona Convention on the Mediterranean (1976); and the Convention on the Protection of the Alps (1991). The EU is also bound by the Aarhus Convention (1998), which provides for public access to environmental information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice.

International efforts to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are made under the UNFCCC. In December 2015, the Parties to the UNFCCC adopted the Paris Agreement, a legally binding climate agreement that applies to all countries and aims to limit global warming to well below 2 °C and pursue efforts to stay below 1.5 °C. (2.5.2) Within the UNFCCC, the REDD+ initiative provides instruments for combating deforestation and forest degradation in the tropics. The Paris Agreement marks the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans, and the protection of biodiversity. Moreover, the agreement points to the critical role of the land use sector in reaching the long-term climate mitigation objectives.

## OBJECTIVES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

### A. Earlier Biodiversity action plans

In May 2006, the Commission adopted a communication and an action plan entitled '[Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 – and beyond: sustaining ecosystem services for human well-being](#)'. As the EU was unlikely to meet its 2010 target of halting biodiversity decline, a new strategy was adopted by the Commission in June 2011 in order to 'halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystems services in the EU by 2020, and restore them [...], while stepping up the EU contribution to averting global biodiversity loss'. In December 2011, the Council endorsed the [EU biodiversity strategy to 2020](#), incorporating the following six targets: full implementation of EU nature legislation so as to protect biodiversity; better protection of ecosystems and greater use of green infrastructure; more sustainable agriculture and forestry; better management of fish stocks; tighter controls on invasive alien species; and a bigger EU contribution to averting global biodiversity loss.

### B. Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora

The Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, amended by [Directive 97/62/EC](#)) established a European network, Natura 2000. It comprises 'Sites of Community Interest'/'Special Areas of Conservation' designated by Member States, and 'Special Protection Areas' classified pursuant to Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds. With a total area of over 850 000 km<sup>2</sup>, this is the largest coherent network of protected sites in the world. The Habitats Directive aims principally to promote the conservation of biological diversity while taking account of economic, social, cultural and regional requirements. The amended [Birds Directive](#) (2009/147/EC) covers the protection, management and control of (wild) birds, including rules for sustainable hunting.

### C. Invasive alien species (IAS)

Tighter controls on IAS are one of the six targets of the EU biodiversity strategy to 2020. IAS cause damage amounting to billions of euros every year in the EU, not only to



ecosystems but also to crops and livestock, disrupting local ecology and affecting human health. A key feature of [Regulation \(EU\) No 1143/2014](#) on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of IAS is the list of IAS of Union concern. The regulation seeks – through prevention, early warning and rapid response – to protect native biodiversity and to minimise and mitigate the impact of such species on human health and the economy. In particular, the Member States will have to establish surveillance systems and action plans.

#### **D. Access and benefit-sharing**

Following the adoption of the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing, the Commission presented a proposal in October 2012 with a view to laying down binding requirements for access to genetic resources in the country of origin and ensuring that the benefits are fairly and equitably shared. An agreement between Parliament and the Council led to the adoption of [Regulation \(EU\) No 511/2014](#). Under this regulation, genetic resources and traditional knowledge associated with such resources can only be transferred and utilised in accordance with terms mutually agreed between the users (businesses, private collectors and institutions) and the authorities of the country of origin.

#### **E. Exploitation and trade of wild fauna and flora**

The CITES convention regulates international trade, specifically the (re-)exporting and importing of live and dead animals and plants and of parts and derivatives thereof, on the basis of a system of permits and certificates. The basic regulation ([\(EC\) No 338/97](#)) on the protection of wild fauna and flora by regulating trade applies the objectives, principles and provisions of the CITES convention to EU law. Whenever a change is made to the list of species listed in the annexes to Council Regulation (EC) No 338/97, e.g. in order to implement listing decisions by the CITES Conference of the Parties, this is done by means of a Commission implementing regulation, such as [Implementing Regulation \(EU\) 2019/1587](#), which prohibits the introduction into the EU of specimens of certain species of wild fauna and flora.

#### **F. Biodiversity related to animal welfare**

The Commission launched the [2006-2010 community action plan on protection and welfare of animals](#) in support of the ‘three Rs’ principle (replacing, reducing and refining the use of animals for research). [Directive 2010/63/EU](#) on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes (repealing Directive 86/609/EEC) is based on that principle, and took effect from 1 January 2013. Moreover, [Regulation \(EC\) No 1007/2009](#) aims to ensure that products derived from seals are no longer found on the EU market.

#### **G. Marine biodiversity**

Marine biodiversity comes within the scope of the biodiversity action plans for natural resources and fisheries. The review of the EU Biodiversity Strategy stresses the importance of the ‘good ecological status’ of seas and coastal areas if they are to support biodiversity. Furthermore, the [Marine Strategy Framework Directive \(MSFD\)](#) (2008/56/EC) on the protection and conservation of the marine environment entered into force in July 2008. It aimed to ensure the good status of the EU’s marine waters by 2020 and to protect the resource base on which marine-related



economic and social activities depend. The MSFD was amended by [Directive \(EU\) 2017/845](#), replacing its Annex III concerning the indicative lists of elements to be taken into account for the preparation of marine strategies.

## H. Forests

Forests make up almost 30% of the surface area of the Natura 2000 network. The EU has close to 182 million hectares of forests, covering 43% of its land area and therefore several EU measures are aimed at protecting forests. The [Timber Regulation \(\(EU\) No 995/2010\)](#) lays down the obligations of operators who place timber and timber products on the EU market. It counters the trade in illegally harvested timber and timber products through key obligations and prohibits the placing on the EU market for the first time of illegally harvested timber and timber products. A Commission communication entitled '[A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest-based sector](#)' was adopted in September 2013. [A mid-term report](#) on the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy concluded that significant progress towards the 2020 objectives had been made.

## I. Land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF)

The LULUCF sector covers the use of soils, trees, plants, biomass and timber, and has the particular characteristic of not only emitting GHGs but also being able to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere. Until 2020, Member States were committed under the Kyoto Protocol to ensuring that GHG emissions from land use were compensated by an equivalent absorption of CO<sub>2</sub>, made possible by additional action in the sector. [\(2.5.2\)](#) The EU now aims to enshrine this principle (the so-called no-debit rule) in EU law for the period 2021-2030, by incorporating LULUCF into the EU's emissions reduction efforts for the first time. Under [Regulation \(EU\) 2018/841](#), which entered into force on 9 July 2018, on the inclusion of GHG emissions and removals from LULUCF into the 2030 climate and energy framework, GHG emissions from LULUCF should be offset by at least an equivalent removal of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere during the period 2021-2030. The [LULUCF Regulation was amended](#) in April 2023 to determine a new 2030 target in line with the European Green Deal. In particular, the objective is to expand EU carbon sinks by 15%, corresponding to 310 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent. In May 2023, a [Commission guidance document](#) aided Member States in aligning land use, forestry and agriculture with updated national energy and climate plans, ensuring compliance with revised regulations.

## J. Financial instruments

Since 1992, the EU's dedicated funding instrument for the environment has been the LIFE programme. Nature conservation and biodiversity have been included among the sub-programmes for the first four phases already completed. The fifth phase of the LIFE programme (introduced by Regulation (EU) No 1293/2013 and covering the LIFE period 2014-2020) consisted of two main fields of action, on climate change and the environment. A budget of EUR 1.155 billion was available for nature and biodiversity, as part of the environment sub-programme. Other funding to support biodiversity has been taken up under agriculture and fisheries policies, Cohesion and Structural Funds, and the multiannual research framework programmes. The most recent phase of the LIFE programme (2021-2027) is structured in the same way as the previous one, with



the same two fields of action and four sub-programmes. The budget for the nature and biodiversity sub-programme is EUR 2.15 billion.

#### **K. The biodiversity and forest strategies for 2030**

On 11 December 2019, the Commission presented the [European Green Deal](#), an ambitious package of measures intended to enable the EU to become carbon neutral by 2050. The European Green Deal provides [an action plan](#) to transform the EU into a sustainable and competitive economy. Among the actions proposed is a new [EU biodiversity strategy for 2030](#) (published on 20 May 2020) with measures to address the main drivers of biodiversity loss, as well as a new [EU forest strategy for 2030](#) (published on 14 July 2021) with measures to support deforestation-free value chains. The Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 addresses the five main drivers of biodiversity loss (changes in land and sea use, overexploitation, climate change, pollution, and invasive alien species), sets out an enhanced governance framework to fill remaining gaps, ensures the full implementation of EU legislation, and pulls together all existing efforts. The Forest Strategy for 2030 aims to adapt Europe's forests to the new conditions, weather extremes and considerable uncertainty brought about by climate change. This is a precondition for forests to continue to fulfil their socioeconomic functions and ensure vibrant rural areas with thriving populations.

As part of the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030, the Commission adopted a [proposal on 22 June 2022 for a nature restoration law](#), for the sake of 'restoring damaged ecosystems and bringing nature back across Europe, from agricultural land and seas, to forests and urban environments'. The law would require Member States to develop national restoration plans to pursue the targets while allowing them the flexibility to take into account their national circumstances.

On 24 January 2023, the Commission published a [communication entitled 'Revision of the EU Pollinators Initiative - A new deal for pollinators'](#), aiming at revising the [2018 EU pollinators initiative](#), as part of the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030. The 2018 initiative represented the first ever EU framework to address the decline of wild pollinators. The revised EU pollinators initiative sets objectives for 2030 and actions under three priorities: improving pollinator conservation and tackling the causes of their decline; improving knowledge; and mobilising society and promoting strategic planning and cooperation.

## **ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

As co-legislator, Parliament has long been supportive of EU biodiversity protection and climate change policies. In September 2010, Parliament adopted [a resolution on the implementation of legislation aiming at the conservation of biodiversity](#), in view of the post-2010 target. It expressed deep concern at the absence from the international political agenda of any sense of urgency in relation to halting the loss of biodiversity, and called for improved biodiversity governance in both internal and external relations.

In November 2016, Parliament adopted [a resolution in response to the action plan on wildlife trafficking](#), aiming at countering this organised and destructive crime that represents a threat to biodiversity by bringing many species to the brink of extinction. The action plan has three priorities: prevention, enforcement and cooperation. The





importance of global cooperation between countries of origin, transit countries and destination countries was stressed. In [October 2016](#) and [October 2017](#), Parliament adopted resolutions against the authorisation by the Commission of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) – maize, soybean, etc. – and on efforts to facilitate the banning of GMO cultivation by Member States in line with the objective of protecting biodiversity, nature and soil.

In its resolution of 14 October 2015 entitled '[Towards a new international climate agreement in Paris](#)', Parliament recalled that climate change is accelerating the loss of biodiversity, called for an agreement that involves the 'comprehensive effort of all sectors' and noted that land use 'has significant cost-effective potential for mitigation and enhancing resilience'.

Parliament's [resolution of 16 January 2020 on the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties \(COP15\) to the Convention on Biological Diversity](#) underlined the need to increase the ambition and inclusiveness, and improve the functioning of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

In its [resolution of 8 October 2020](#) on the new EU forest strategy, Parliament also stressed the crucial role played by the post-2020 EU forest strategy and the European Green Deal in meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Parliament's resolution of 22 October 2020 with recommendations to the Commission on [an EU legal framework to halt and reverse EU-driven global deforestation](#) stressed that trade and investment policy need to be reviewed in order to address the global deforestation challenge in a more effective manner, by creating a global level playing field and taking into account the link between trade agreements and global biodiversity, as well as forest ecosystems.

For further information on this topic, please see the website of the [Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety \(ENVI\)](#).

Georgios Amanatidis / Maria-Mirela Curmei  
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