

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions

**DEVE-IV-009**

Brussels, 6 December 2006

**OPINION**  
of the  
Committee of the Regions  
of 6 December 2006  
on the  
**Communication from the Commission:**  
**Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 – and beyond**  
COM(2006) 216 final

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

**Having regard to** the Communication from the Commission: *Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 – and beyond. Sustaining ecosystem services for human well-being* and its annexes, in particular the Action Plan (COM(2006) 216 final);

**Having regard to** the decision of the European Commission of 2 December 2005 to consult it on this subject, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

**Having regard to** its Bureau's decision of 25 April 2006 to instruct the Commission for Sustainable Development to draw up an opinion on this subject;

**Having regard to** Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna, and Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds;

**Having regard to** its Opinion of 12 February 2003 on the Communication from the Commission: *Towards a Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection* - CdR 190/2002 fin<sup>1</sup>;

**Having regard to** its Opinion of 17 November 2005 on *The contribution of local and regional authorities to combating climate change* - CdR 215/2005 fin;

**Having regard to** its Opinion of 26 April 2006 on the Proposal for a *Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a Framework for Community Action in the field of Marine Environmental Policy* (COM (2005) 505 final - 2005/0211 (COD)) and on the *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament – Thematic Strategy on the Protection and Conservation of the Marine Environment* (COM (2005) 504 final) - CdR 46/2006 fin;

**Having regard to** its draft opinion (CdR 159/2006 rev. 1) adopted on 6 October 2006 by its Commission for Sustainable Development (rapporteur: Mr van Gelder, Queen's Commissioner of the Province of Zeeland, NL/EPP).

**adopted unanimously the following opinion at its 67<sup>th</sup> plenary session, held on 6 and 7 December 2006 (meeting of 6 December) :**

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[OJ C 128, 29.5.2003, p. 43.](#)

## The Committee of the Regions' views and recommendations

### The Committee of the Regions

#### 1. General comments

- 1.1 **welcomes** the Communication and the proposed Action Plan which provide an accurate assessment of the situation and highlight the measures to be taken in order to help achieve the 2010 objectives; **agrees** with the Commission's evaluation but **regrets** the delay in its publication;
- 1.2 **believes** that biodiversity to a large extent determines the identity of the region ; **stresses** that biodiversity is an important basis for quality of life, health, recreation and tourism and the production of regional products and services;
- 1.3 **points out** that the number of species and high-value ecosystems has increased with the advent of the ten new Member States of the European Union;
- 1.4 **welcomes** the Council Conclusions of 23/24 March 2006 calling for the integration of the 2010 objectives into all relevant Lisbon agenda policies. The regional development plans implemented in many regions show that the tension between economics and biodiversity can be resolved;
- 1.5 **points out** that, in contrast to the general acknowledgement of the intrinsic value of biodiversity, its economic value is underestimated; in the long run biodiversity is a prerequisite for health, a high standard of living and employment;
- 1.6 **underlines** the need to build partnerships between all stakeholders in order to raise awareness amongst citizens (especially children) and the public and private sectors of the importance of biodiversity, so that a common effort is made to preserve biodiversity and sustainable ecosystem services;
- 1.7 **regrets** that, in spite of the political commitments made by all the Member States, the 2010 objectives are still a long way off and **calls for** biodiversity to be placed high on the political agenda by all levels of government;
- 1.8 **is pleased** that there are many examples at local and regional level that show that the loss of biodiversity can be stemmed and the restoration of habitats achieved (see CdR 159/2006 appendix);

## 2. **Biodiversity in the EU**

- 2.1 **deplores** the insufficient allocation of EU funds for financing the 2010 objectives in the 2007–2013 financial perspective, especially for the Natura 2000 initiative and rural development; **calls** therefore for Member States to provide their regions and municipalities with the means to preserve and restore biodiversity on their territory, in particular in order to maintain Natura 2000 sites; and **urges** the greater use of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund for projects with special benefit to biodiversity;
- 2.2 **points out** that for optimal realisation and conservation of the Natura 2000 ecological network, it is essential for the regions to strike the right balance between the top-down approach and the flexibility needed to establish this network. Uniform management criteria must adopted for all sites included in the network;
- 2.3 **stresses** that a denser network is essential in order to ensure sustainable ecosystems, also in the marine environment, and **is pleased** with the emphasis placed on network density in the light of the consequences of climate change for habitats and species; also **suggests** to implement conservation measures for buffer zones and ecological corridors which guarantee the viability of sites included in the network;
- 2.4 **points out** that while the policy framework established by the EU provides for a high level of biodiversity protection, implementation and monitoring are still inadequate in many Member States, and that when new biodiversity protection areas are being set up, insufficient thought is given to the conditions needed for harmonious development of the ecosystem;
- 2.5 **recommends** that biodiversity plans at EU, national, regional and local level be coordinated;
- 2.6 **stresses** that as many measures provided for in the Action Plan for the Member States cannot be implemented effectively without the assistance and participation of the regional and local authorities, representatives from the regional and local level must be actively involved with all new biodiversity policy developments and be provided with the necessary resources;
- 2.7 **is conscious** of the considerable impact of agriculture on biodiversity in the EU: depending on the way land is farmed, agriculture can either be of great benefit to biodiversity and create safe havens for a large variety of species, or it can cause serious harm by destroying habitats and by polluting the environment; **notes** that agriculture is still a major beneficiary of the EU budget, and that the EU therefore has a strong leverage for influencing farming methods; **argues**, therefore, in the framework of the 2008 review of the 2007-2013 financial perspective, for a substantial shift of funding towards sustainable forms of farming and landscape preservation;

- 2.8 **calls on** the Commission and the Member States to assess the impact of current subsidies on biodiversity, to abolish incentives that are detrimental to biodiversity and ecosystem services and to encourage the greater use of economic instruments for the protection of biodiversity;
- 2.9 **considers it advisable** to deal with biodiversity concerns not only in the field of environment policy, but also to mainstream them into other policy areas at EU and Member State level, especially transport, energy, industry, agriculture, fisheries, regional policy, tourism and research policy;
- 2.10 **fully recognises** the importance of sea and coastal waters as the basis of almost half of Europe's biodiversity and **calls for** a greater awareness of marine biodiversity policy on the part of governments and other stakeholders; **points out** the importance of an accelerated implementation of the Habitats Directive for the marine environment, the stopping of overfishing in both European and non-European waters and the complete integration of biodiversity into the future European maritime policy;
- 2.11 **notes** the limited scope for spatial planning action at EU level, since this policy area – of key importance for biodiversity preservation and restoration – falls within the responsibility of the Member States; **urges** that biodiversity issues be given a prominent place in spatial planning decisions at national, regional and local level, in particular by means of the Strategic Environmental Assessment;
- 2.12 **is convinced that**, in the development and implementation of the policy of combating invasive alien species, the present rules should be more effectively used and implemented and **calls for** greater involvement of the regions in this matter;
- 2.13 **welcomes** the plans to develop a comprehensive EU strategy for the prevention and control of invasive alien species including the setting up of an early warning system; however **points out** that, bearing in mind the scarce financial and human resources, new administrative burdens must not be created;
- 2.14 **recommends** that basic legislation and lists of alien species be drawn up, laying down rules for importing, trading in and keeping such species, to ensure that European action is coordinated and concerted; also **underlines** the necessity to examine, in the framework of environmental impact assessments, the impact of projects which introduce or work with potentially invasive alien species;
- 2.15 **points out** that conserving biodiversity, and especially flora and fauna species, should not prevent their use and exploitation, provided that this is duly regulated, monitored and done in a sustainable way;
- 2.16 **recommends** strict application of the precautionary principle for the admission and introduction of GMOs;

### 3. The EU and global biodiversity

- 3.1 **notes** that the decisions taken at the 8th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held in Curitiba, Brazil, in March 2006 constitute an important step forward; and **aware** that the 9th Conference of Parties will be held in Bonn in early 2008 under German chairmanship, **urges** the EU and its Member States to use this event to present an assessment of the Commission Biodiversity Communication and also to prepare for an event with stronger regional and local authority involvement, inter alia via the respective national associations;;
- 3.2 **welcomes the** good example set by regions which, in the context of development aid, share their experience of biodiversity issues with their partner regions and support their partner regions' measures to promote biodiversity (see appendix);
- 3.3 **notes** the responsibility of the European Union for biodiversity preservation worldwide; **is aware** of this fact and recommends that greater account be taken of this in trade and development policy;

### 4. Biodiversity and climate change

- 4.1 **realises** that biodiversity preservation policy can only be successful if ambitious policies are put in place on a global scale to halt climate change; **considers** it essential that Member States which are not yet meeting their obligations under the Kyoto protocol should catch up; **calls for** the conclusion of an ambitious global climate change convention including all major industrial countries and sectors;
- 4.2 **recommends** that regional research be carried out on the effects of climate change;
- 4.3 **adds** that, although the development of policies on bio-fuel can be important in combating climate change, this will only be effective if it goes hand in hand with measures for substantial reductions in total fuel use, and provided that only raw materials, technologies and crops are used which do not have a negative impact on biodiversity both nationally and internationally, and that does not result in farming expanding into biologically valuable ecosystems;

### 5. The knowledge basis

- 5.1 **points out** the need for greater knowledge of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in Europe and throughout the world, and the accessibility of such knowledge. This also includes the exchange of best practice between the Member States and regions (see appendix); the interoperability of biodiversity data at different levels must consequently be

improved, taking account in particular of regional and local data and making use of GIS (Geographical Information System) tools and Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI);

- 5.2 **stresses** that knowledge of biodiversity in the marine environment is particularly inadequate and **recommends** that this be developed;
- 5.3 **adds** that, in addition to the scientific knowledge mentioned by the Commission, more attention should be paid to the knowledge and experience of local residents and **recommends** that the volunteers' knowledge be pooled with that of scientists; **urges** that children be involved;
- 5.4 **recommends** defining communication strategies, in order to raise awareness and to develop the sense of responsibility at all levels and in all spheres that society as a whole should feel for protecting and conserving biodiversity and also to enhance exchanges of information between the scientific community and administrations;

## 6. **The four key supporting measures**

### **Ensuring adequate financing**

- 6.1 **notes** that little money is likely to be available for biodiversity via LIFE+ and the research budget and that, furthermore, there is a danger that the Member States will not give sufficient consideration to the importance of biodiversity in the current Structural Funds;
- 6.2 **notes** a divergence between the considerable ambitions of the Communication and the resources made available to achieve these goals;

### **Strengthening EU policy-making**

- 6.3 **endorses** the ideas being put forward to strengthen biodiversity in European decision-making; **recommends** the obligatory integration of biodiversity into other fields of policy; **supports** the idea put forward in the Action Plan of involving the regions as well as the Member States;

### **Building partnerships**

- 6.4 **trusts that** the formation of partnerships will be encouraged in the EU. The regions are extremely well equipped to take on a facilitating role; **points to** successful cooperation in the context of EU programmes and its results (appendix);
- 6.5 **underlines** the need to involve private land-owners, in order to ensure that biodiversity is preserved, by means of instruments such as cooperation agreements;;

### **Fostering greater public awareness and participation**

- 6.6 **emphasises** the importance of greater public involvement. If ordinary people do not appreciate the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem services, projects will have less chance of success; **recommends that** European and national money be made available for Community projects;
- 6.7 **recommends** the development, in close cooperation with the *Countdown 2010 initiative* and the *Beautiful Europe initiative*, of a communications strategy involving Member States, NGOs, and regional and local authorities with the aim of promoting the 2010 goals;
7. **Monitoring, evaluation and review**
- 7.1 **supports** the cooperation between the Member States and the private sector and **emphasises** that citizens and volunteers are heavily involved throughout Europe in monitoring biodiversity;
- 7.2 **calls for** Member States to be encouraged to present the results of their policies in a way that ordinary people can recognise and relate to, and which highlights the regional dimension;
- 7.3 **points out** that regional monitoring must form a basis for national and international monitoring and evaluation. To this end, effective monitoring systems based on indicators and periodical reports have to be put in place.
8. **Vision**
- 8.1 **welcomes** the proposal for an EU-wide vision of the future of European biodiversity and **underlines** the great importance of involving the regions;
- 8.2 **calls for** a renewed vision for the approach to biodiversity going beyond 2010, with the emphasis on the positive contribution of ecosystem services related to the environment (landscape).

Brussels, 6 December 2006

The President  
of the  
Committee of the Regions

Michel Delebarre

The Secretary-General  
of the  
Committee of the Regions

Gerhard Stahl