



European Network of Heads of Nature Conservation Agencies (ENCA)

ENCA is an informal network which fosters exchange of information and collaboration amongst its partners, identifies future challenges and offers information and advice to decision-makers in the field of nature conservation and landscape protection.

ENCA brings together scientific evidence and knowledge of practical application together with experiences in administration and policy advice in the context of biodiversity and ecosystem goods and services. More details can be found at www.encanetwork.eu

STATEMENT FROM THE EUROPEAN NETWORK OF HEADS OF NATURE CONSERVATION AGENCIES (ENCA)

regarding the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, *EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 - Bringing nature back into our lives*

The state of global biodiversity at the gene, species and ecosystem levels is at the most perilous point in human history and the decline has been accelerating in every region of the world, significantly reducing nature's capacity to contribute to people's well-being. Biodiversity has been and still is declining in Europe, despite long-term efforts to reverse the trend.

This is because of a number of common pressures such as habitat loss, overexploitation and unsustainable use of natural resources, air, land and water pollution, increasing numbers and impact of invasive alien species and climate change. This alarming trend endangers economies, livelihoods, food security and the quality of life of people everywhere. Only transformative changes to economic, political, and social systems will allow humankind to reverse the trend by increasing biodiversity locally, regionally, and globally.

Therefore, ENCA very much welcomes the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 - *Bringing nature back into our lives*, published on 20 May 2020, as a key policy document for further progress in conservation of biological diversity and sustainable use of its components at the national, EU, pan-European and global level. The document is an ambitious, constructive and coherent strategy providing a clear framework to handle biodiversity loss. Nevertheless, we perceive that implementation and enforcement of the strategy could be difficult and uneven and thus jeopardize its success. Therefore, it is necessary to make every effort and make use of every possible mechanism, particularly in the area of monitoring and review, to guide and steer the implementation and enforcement of the strategy.

The 10-year plan places a much stronger emphasis on the importance of biodiversity for human well-being and development and it includes many quantitative commitments to tackle the global biodiversity crisis by a huge range of activities. We particularly appreciate that it is the first time the EU key biodiversity-related policy document states the aim to raise funds to implement it. We very much support the Strategy's emphasis on improved governance (new governance framework), the legally binding approaches (binding protection and restoration targets to be proposed by 2021) and the whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches. The document provides clear strategic directions for enhancing nature conservation and sustainable biodiversity management in European countries in a holistic way

and sends a strong signal to raise ambition on the future CBD Global Biodiversity Framework for the post-2020 period.

On the basis of ENCA's long-standing experience in national implementation of the EU legislation, we provided a reflections paper on delivering biodiversity and environmental objectives through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for the period 2021-27. This was followed by evidence via an annotated reference list to support consideration of a requirement for at least 10% of agricultural land as 'high-diversity landscape features', such as buffer strips, rotational or non-rotational fallow land, hedges, stone walls, and ponds, as well as a response to the Adaptation to Climate Change Blueprint for a new, more ambitious EU strategy.

ENCA's recommendations as regards the implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy

As pointed out above, maintaining the current high level of ambition throughout the Strategy's implementation will be crucial. Based on our combined experience we would like to highlight the following issues:

- Consequent implementation efforts, including communication, education and awareness raising at all levels and with a strong focus on the whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches are essential to achieving the Strategy's objectives. Transformative change can only be brought about when society as a whole is involved and biodiversity is mainstreamed in all sectors and all levels of society, economy and policy making.
- The new EU Nature Restoration Plan is at the core of the Strategy. Especially the commitment to propose legally binding nature restoration targets in 2021 poses a great potential for nature in the EU. ENCA strongly supports the development and implementation of ambitious legally binding restoration targets.
- Beside nature restoration, the strategy also proposes ambitious nature conservation objectives through area-based conservation measures (including 30% of protected areas, etc.). ENCA would very much welcome a clear focus on how to achieve the stipulated 30% of protected areas. Clear protection targets are needed, e.g. it should be defined what the 10% of strictly protected areas implies in terms of IUCN categories, considering all protected areas as a network of ecological corridors and establishing rules regarding their functionality. In this context, we would like to emphasize that our ability to successfully recover wildlife populations and communities/assemblages and restore whole ecosystems will always be limited and can only be seen as the last resort, conservation must be the priority.
- ENCA welcomes and strongly supports both the EU Biodiversity Strategy and Farm to Fork Strategy. They jointly present various ambitious and measureable targets to increase biodiversity in agricultural landscapes, to reduce pressures that agriculture has on biodiversity and to re-establish a balance between nature's material (such as food and energy), regulating (such as pollination and soil formation), and non-material contributions to people (such as cultural experiences or opportunities to develop a sense of place). To achieve these biodiversity targets, it will be crucial to integrate them consequently into the CAP. ENCA's evidence-based response to the EC's

legislative proposals concerning the future CAP summarised impacts of agricultural practice on biological diversity and related challenges¹.

- ENCA encourages the commitment to protect all remaining EU primary and old-growth forests and the planting of new trees as a nature-based solution for combating climate change and for increasing biodiversity. We support the statement that the EU must increase the quantity, quality and resilience of its forests.
- Biodiversity considerations should also be embedded in regulations concerning soil protection, conservation and management. Large-scale soil degradation across the pan-European region should be adequately addressed, *e.g.* by updating and implementing the EU Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection enhancing soil fertility protection, reducing soil erosion, soil consumption including soil sealing and increasing soil organic matter, the latter being a crucial player in climate change mitigation and adaptation, water retention in the landscape and combating drought. Updating and implementing the EU Soil Thematic Strategy would also encourage necessary inter-sectoral activities at the national level.
- The spread of invasive alien species (IAS), a global consequence of an increasingly connected world, will be increasing and accelerating in the future. When considering the impacts of IAS on threatened species, European/EU Red Lists are better fit for the purpose because they reflect risk of extinction in species or other taxa at the pan-European, and EU level respectively. It would also be useful to assess at the national level the effectiveness of the implementation of the EU regulation on IAS, and the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention).
- By proposing a new biodiversity governance framework, the Strategy tries to respond to the major implementation problems that have hindered progress under the EU's existing strategy and the previous commitments. Success in meeting the Strategy's targets will be contingent on mainstreaming biodiversity with other policy objectives (for example fisheries policies). Thus, more concrete governance arrangements for other stakeholders are needed, similarly to those dealing with the CAP. ENCA fully agrees that a legally binding approach to the biodiversity governance framework would strongly improve the Strategy's implementation in practice, funding being a key issue. At the national level, this will be very much an issue for updating and enhancing national biodiversity strategies and action plans taking into account, *inter alia*, adequate and flexible roles of sectors other than the environment protection one.

The biodiversity strategy is all the more important in the light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, which clearly shows permanent and strong interconnectedness between nature degradation, destruction and loss and human health, society and economy. To learn and recover from the COVID-19 crisis, biodiversity and the European Green Deal should be placed at the centre of the EU's recovery plan, to ensure a healthy, prosperous and sustainable society. The effective and sound implementation of such ambitious strategy should be supported by adequate capacities and resources.

ENCA, Vienna, 1 September 2020

¹ ENCA (2020) Delivering biodiversity and environmental objectives through the CAP 2021-27: A synthesis of evidence by ENCA, 19 p.