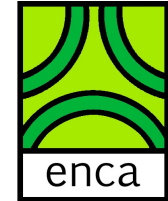


A Rural Vision for Europe



September 2020

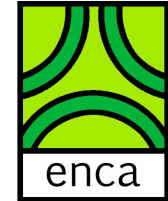
ENCA



European Network of Heads of Nature Conservation Agencies

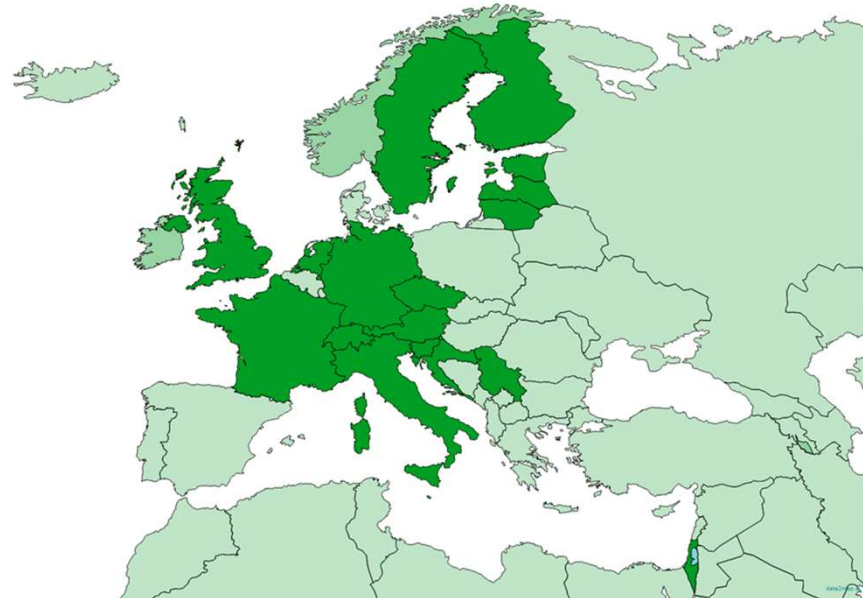
- ENCA is an informal network which
 - fosters exchange of information and collaboration amongst its partners
 - identifies future challenges
 - offers information and advice to decision-makers in the field of nature conservation and ecosystem goods and services.
- ENCA brings together scientific evidence and knowledge of practical application with experiences in administration and policy advice.
- Technical expertise is organised within ENCA Interest Groups (IG's), there are currently four: Climate Change, Sustainable Land Use and Agriculture, Genetically Modified Organisms and, Reporting.

ENCA

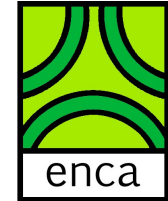


- ENCA currently has currently 20 member organisations,
- employing approx. 5,000 nature conservation professionals

ENCA across Europe:

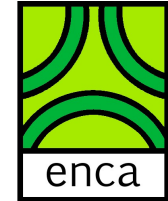


ENCA feedback to EC “Roadmap” re long term vision for rural areas



- ENCA IG Sustainable Land Use and Agriculture, (with a remit focused on the reform of Agricultural Policy and the design of integrated Rural Development policies), have decided to prioritise the long-term rural vision and seek to ensure due consideration is given to environmental aspects in the future stages of the comprehensive consultation process and in the vision document itself.
- As input to this ‘Roadmap’ consultation we commissioned IEEP to develop this evidence piece in the form of a slide pack. Full references can be found at the end of the presentation.

ENCA welcomes the proposed vision



- ENCA welcomes the European Commission's initiative to prepare a long-term vision for rural areas in Europe and the opportunity to shape the Vision through this Roadmap consultation.
- ENCA appreciates the value of a long-term rural vision in setting the direction of policy and engaging stakeholders at all levels from the local to the European.
- Such Visions can help to drive strategic transitions of the kind now required in rural areas in the period to 2040.

Several key priorities must be captured, and integrated, within the Vision for the future of rural areas

- As well as prioritising the response to demographic change and tackling the reasons why some areas have been “left behind”⁽¹⁾, there is also a compelling environmental dimension to be addressed in the Vision and actions to follow.
- Our input to this consultation focusses on the environmental dimension. The subsequent slides set out the evidence supporting inclusion of the environmental dimension and some of the key issues.

(a) Rural areas are a crucial repository of natural capital and key source of ecosystem services (ESS)

- Natural capital extends to extensive areas of agricultural land, natural areas, forests, water supply, minerals, renewable energy, stored carbon and other assets.
- They provide ESS, including food and fibre supply, carbon capture, raw materials from living ecosystems and clean water to urban as well as rural areas. (2)
- Maintenance and enhancement of this resource and continuation of ESS supply is critical to the European economy, society and public health as well as to the integrity of ecosystems. (3)
- Natura 2000 sites are valued at Euro 200-300 billion per annum. (Economic benefits study for EC 2013) (4)
- Natura sites cover more than 20% of the land area in 11 Member States, all (other than Luxembourg) in central or southern Europe. (Derived from Natura 2000 Barometer, EEA 2020) (5)

(b) Threats to this natural capital and flow of ESS need to be countered

- Flows of ESS to 2040 are in jeopardy in the EU because of a range of environmental pressures combined with insufficient response eg slow adaptation to climate change. (6)
- Pressures include soil erosion, forest fires, declining soil moisture and growing desertification in parts of Southern Europe, possibly lower crop yields following climate change.
- Pollution loads in water remain a major concern (slide 20).
- Many of the environmentally most vulnerable areas are in southern and central Europe.
- Likely overlap with priority rural regions where there is both low income and a rapidly declining population. (EU Demography Report 2020) (7)

(c) If not countered there is a danger of more “left behind” rural areas emerging

- Danger of declining resource base as climate changes, eg soil and water, elements of biodiversity.
- And potentially reduced agricultural and forest production and threats to investment in tourism.
- Becomes a barrier to inward investment and can depress employment opportunities. May exacerbate depopulation.
- Costly to reverse damage at later date: for example - conflicts with other public investment priorities, enhanced supply of services.

(d) Many current EU strategies have a strong green focus with major implications for rural areas

Including:

- European Green Deal and Action Plan.
- The Just Transition Mechanism.
- EU Biodiversity Strategy.
- The Farm to Fork Strategy and new CAP.
- The forthcoming EU strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change.
- The updated Soil Thematic Strategy (due 2021).
- The new EU forest Strategy (due 2021).
- Zero pollution Action Plan (due 2021).
- The Pollinators initiative.

(e) “Left behind” and other rural areas will need to play a key role in delivering:

- The 3 billion or more trees to be planted.
- A large scale investment in renewable energy, including from solar, wind, biomass. Possible new uses for marginal and abandoned land.
- An escalation of initiatives for carbon capture in soils, vegetation, restored habitats and “Nature based solutions” to climate change.
- Extensive transformations in agriculture, such as the growth of organic farming to 25% of the farmed area, major investment in nutrient management and precision methods. (8)
- The restoration of nature over a large area following the EU targets to be proposed in 2021.
- Joined up planning and coherence across these intersecting programmes is essential.

(f) Such programmes will be a key source of jobs and economic opportunities for rural areas

- Shift in energy supply investment more into rural locations.
- Higher value added in greener forms of agriculture.
- Estimated that organic farming results in 10-20% more jobs per hectare than conventional agriculture. (OECD 2016) (9)
- Potential for increased recreational and tourism expenditure in areas with restored ecosystems and richer landscapes.

(g) An improved environment should be part of a strategy to reverse demographic decline

- Attracting new businesses into rural communities facilitated by improved connectivity and appealing environment.⁽¹⁰⁾
- Increased potential for home working post Covid -19 gives new flexibility to work in more remote areas. Those locations with a better environment gain advantage.
- The better environment and prospects for more jobs associated with a flow of environmentally driven investment have potential to encourage younger people to remain in regions where depopulation is an issue.

Some leading environmental issues for rural areas in the years to 2040 include:

- Their role in adaptation to climate change.
- Their role in mitigation of climate change.
- Their role in relation to the restoration of biodiversity.
- Their role in the building of sustainable food systems.
- Their role in responding to new land use priorities.

We would suggest that questions relating to these issues should be included in the next stage of the public consultation process on the Long-term Rural Vision.

Adaptation to Climate Change

- Impact of climate change in rural areas already apparent, even in Northern Europe. Will grow and require enhanced response by 2040.
- German government adaptation strategy monitoring report for 2019 shows threats to soil, soil humidity, disease in forests (including spruce), forest fire, accentuated agricultural yield fluctuation, pressures on biodiversity. (11)
- It also underlines importance of conserving grassland, planning flood control areas, need for forest species diversity and need to address increased profitability of irrigation.
- Eco-system-based adaptation (Eba) increasingly seen as a useful, not wholly novel, approach in EU; eg included in Denmark's National adaptation Plan, within a "green transition initiative". (12)
- The EEA is planning to publish an assessment of Eba and Nature Based solutions to the climate challenge in 2021.

Climate Change Mitigation

- Significant changes in land use, infrastructure, resource management, transport, energy supply, agriculture, forestry, nature conservation, built structures etc are required in rural areas to meet the 2050 net zero target.
- In UK for example the Government's Committee on Climate Change has suggested forest cover needs to rise from 13 to 17% by 2050, a major peatland restoration programme undertaken, low carbon farming practices adopted, consumption patterns changed and food waste reduced and energy crops increased annually. (13)
- In Europe peatland ecosystems store more than 5 times the total quantity of CO₂ than forests but are continuing to dry out, underlining the need for restoration. (14) (15)
- There are opportunities for sustainable circular economy initiatives that promote climate action and support green jobs . Examples collected by ENRD include small scale bioenergy supply (eg from hedgerows in France), soil management in Lithuania, crop rotation and biogas production in Italy and wooden furniture production in Poland. (16)

Nature-based Solutions

- Nature-based solutions is an umbrella term for a variety of approaches, including ecosystem-based adaptation and mitigation, green infrastructure investments and eco-disaster risk reduction. (17)
- Generally these entail action in rural areas. Soil, peatland and wetland restoration are all examples. The principle of sustaining functioning ecosystems is important. There are opportunities to channel significant investment into rural areas and the potential to create jobs in advancing climate and related goals.
- Take up of these solutions has been relatively slow despite the potential and more systematic work and support is required. A new IUCN ‘Global standard’ may help to build confidence. (18)
- ENCA is building expertise in this area and has been examining ways to overcome barriers to faster uptake of robust and well designed schemes. (19)

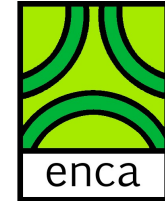
Biodiversity restoration

- As set out in the EU Biodiversity Strategy, an ambitious programme of nature restoration and improved management is envisaged, including the restoration of features in the farmed countryside.
- The stronger emphasis on restoration indicates that investment levels will need to be enhanced, with economic implications for rural areas.
- Employment in nature conservation is not confined to site management and restoration but also extends to economic activities that are compatible with conservation goals, such as sustainable farming, fishing and forestry. (20)
- The scale of these activities is due to increase in the light of the Green Deal and Biodiversity Strategy.

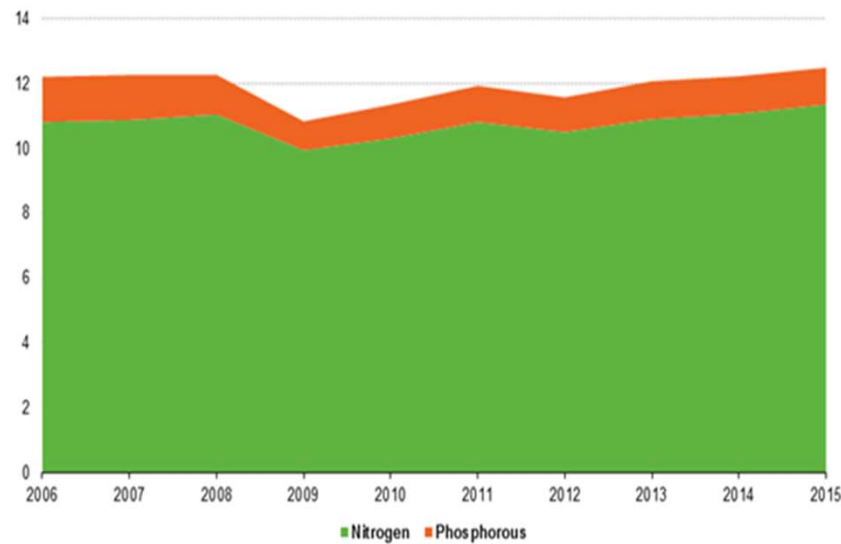
Building sustainable food systems

- Given the goals in the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies, significant shifts in agricultural management and the policies to support this can be anticipated. Recent trends for N surplus and fertilizer use in next slide illustrate the magnitude of the change required in these indicators.
- Food consumption as a whole accounts for around 50% of all land and water use associated by consumption in the EU and a third of acidifying emissions, whilst accounting for about 44 million jobs. (21)
- Independent assessment of the alignment between the CAP and the attainment of SDGs in the EU suggests that extensive changes in the pattern of support and incentive are required. Regions now providing an above average share of environmental public goods receive the same or less support per agricultural worker than regions providing less.(22) Member States will have freedom to focus more under the revised CAP and need to rise to this challenge.
- For example, to encourage generational renewal in agriculture there is scope for mechanisms to reduce barriers to exit instead of a predominant focus on aiding new entrants. (23)

Step change required in Nitrogen balance and fertiliser use to meet Farm to Fork targets.

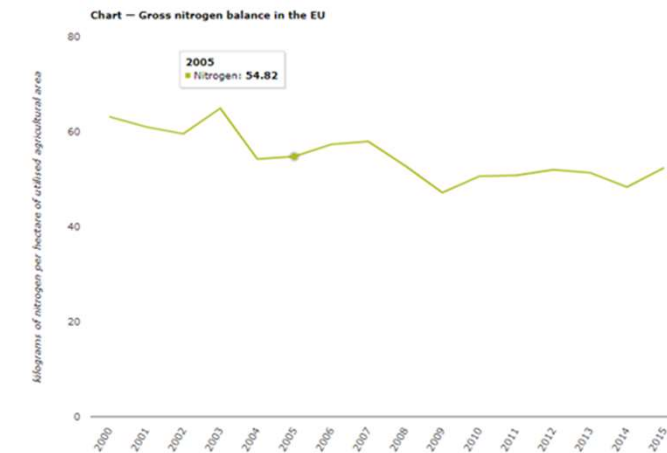


Fertiliser Use



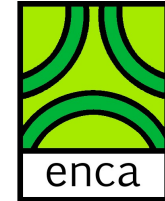
Source: Eurostat data

Agriculture Nitrogen Balance



Note: EU-28 totals calculated by the EEA based on Eurostat data

High Nature Value Farming



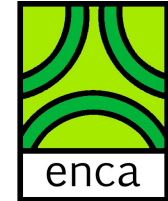
- There is a higher proportion of HNV farmland in less-favoured areas.
- Economic returns are low, but direct payments in these areas often continue to be low (due to limited changes in payment levels).
- Some high conservation value grasslands including Natura areas may **just fall short of eligibility rules**.
- Key Message – the targeting of the AECM on extensive land (e.g. higher nature conservation measure on HNV farmland) is important to support biodiversity and can also make an important contribution to the preservation and improvement in Natura 2000 areas.
- Key Message – The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) remains the most important tool for financing nature conservation in agricultural landscapes and specifically Natura 2000.

New land use priorities

- Within the larger shifts in land use that are needed in rural areas there are sensitive judgements to be made about the right balance to be struck between priorities, the trade-offs and synergies, the balance between prescription and market driven flexibility.
- In many regions more forestry may be appropriate but in others, such as Sweden, a recent history of commercial forestry taking over grazing land of high biodiversity value now points to a need for a different balance and a careful monitoring of change in the countryside. Combining pasture with the presence of trees may be an appropriate solution in some locations. (24)
- Climate change may undermine the economic rationale of some current land uses (eg winter sports in certain areas) and create others. Long-term sustainability criteria will need to be deployed more rigorously than in the past in guiding these choices, underpinned by stronger data sets and analysis.
- This new dynamic and attendant governance challenges need to be reflected in the forthcoming Vision.

Conclusion

- Including an environmental dimension and an appreciation of the sustainability challenge as a core theme in the EU Vision for rural areas is both necessary and supported by the evidence.
- In the Political Guidelines for the incoming European Commission, the President remarked that “ “Our rural areas are the fabric of our society and the heartbeat of our economy..... The diversity of landscape, culture and heritage is one of Europe’s most defining and remarkable features”. This accords well with the need for a holistic Vision.
- We suggest that questions relating to environmental issues are included in the next stage of the public consultation process on the Long-term Rural Vision.



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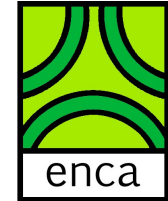
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