

Halting the loss of biodiversity in Europe

The need for information based on indicators and monitoring is urgent

The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 recognised that biodiversity plays a critical role in overall sustainable development and poverty eradication, and is essential to our planet, human well-being and to the livelihood and cultural integrity of people. The summit also highlighted that around 40 % of our global economy is based on biological products and processes. However, biodiversity is under threat and there are signs that it is being dramatically changed and reduced as a result of human activities.

The Convention on Biological Diversity was signed at the first Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 to provide an international framework for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources.

Within the framework of this convention, countries participating in the Johannesburg Summit agreed to take actions to achieve a significant reduction in the current rate of loss of biological diversity by 2010.

Within the European Community and the broader Environment for Europe process, a more demanding target – to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010 – has been adopted. For example, the EU sixth environment action programme specifies the objective to 'protect and where necessary restore the structure and functioning of natural systems and halt the loss of biodiversity both in the European Union and on a global scale by 2010'.

Achieving these targets will require monitoring, information, assessments and understanding of: the causal relationships between human activities, the pressures they produce and the impacts of these pressures on the environment in general and biodiversity in particular; the options for actions to reduce

and prevent biodiversity loss; and the effects and effectiveness of agreed actions on biodiversity.

There are many, inter-related activities that have an impact on biodiversity. Assessments need to be integrated and involve a wide range of expertise and concerned citizens. In addition, information is limited and inconsistent across Europe on the state and trends in biodiversity. This situation is unlikely to change quickly since biodiversity monitoring is quite time consuming, costly and difficult to prioritise and hence has received relatively little attention for funding. Action is now urgent.

European biodiversity monitoring programme

2010 is approaching and work is now underway to provide the information required to help halt biodiversity loss through a more extensive collaborative European biodiversity monitoring programme. Such information and monitoring will be based on a coherent framework to ensure that they are relevant to policy-makers and managers at the local, regional, national, EU and pan-European levels.

In order to create a consistent and collaborative European biodiversity monitoring programme to provide information relevant to the 2010 target and the assessment of progress, four 'lines of action' should be followed:



1. Coordination of existing international monitoring networks

The European biodiversity monitoring and indicator framework (EBMI-F), endorsed by the ministerial process 'Environment for Europe' and coordinated by the European Environment Agency and the European Centre for Nature Conservation, provides a valuable platform for developing a European collaborative biodiversity monitoring programme. This will build on well-established long-term networks and on coordinating their data flows and methodologies, and should maximise the value of currently separate national and regional monitoring exercises.

2. Promotion of biodiversity monitoring across Europe

Only a limited amount of information is currently available at the European level, for example from Member States as part of their reporting obligations under the birds and habitats directives or from parties as part of their national reports under the Convention on Biological Diversity. A broader set of data and information is now needed relating state and trends in biodiversity to the various relevant pressures and human activities and showing progress towards the 2010 target. This is currently being considered through monitoring and indicator requirements for the convention, Natura 2000 sites and the EU biodiversity strategy.

3. Coordination of national information networks

The European Environment Agency is cooperating with its member countries, other participating countries and interested international organisations through the European environment information and observation network (Eionet) and the international working group on biodiversity indicators and monitoring (IWG-BioMIN) to produce a dataflow of validated information on nature, biodiversity, and related activities and pressures that can be used at European level to support action and monitor progress to the 2010 target and beyond.

4. Ensure information available at the European level is policy relevant and useful to everybody involved in halting biodiversity loss

The information gathered and made available at the European level needs to show policy-makers where progress is being made and where further action is required, help raise public and political awareness, and help managers in the field and other interested parties to achieve the target of halting biodiversity loss by 2010.

Concluding remarks

Visionary targets such as the biodiversity target for Europe in 2010 serve as a key spur for promoting and focusing environmental action. The information framework outlined in this briefing demonstrates how a coherent, top down analytical approach can provide the integrated monitoring, data and information required to manage Europe's biodiversity at the local, national, regional and global levels, as well as help achieve the 2010 target and monitor progress to 2010 and beyond.

