



THINK 2030

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VALUING BIODIVERSITY AND REVERSING ITS DECLINE BY 2030

Key messages

Halting the loss of biodiversity is – and should remain - an important target of EU policy. However, the EU did not meet this headline target by 2010, as originally planned, nor will it meet it by 2020. We argue that the EU would not meet it again by 2030 until it receives adequate buy-in from outside the biodiversity sector. Defining a future target should therefore reflect the need for the value of biodiversity and ecosystems to be recognised across the economy and society, and to be taken into account across all economic sectors and areas of policy. To achieve this, we recommend that action is needed in six main areas: Building a social movement to halt biodiversity loss; Stepping up action to implement existing EU policies; Strengthening and reforming EU policy frameworks; Making the EU budget work for biodiversity; Increasing EU action to tackle global biodiversity loss; and supporting EU action through better knowledge and evidence.

The challenge of halting biodiversity loss

Biodiversity conservation has been an important objective of EU policy for 40 years. However, the EU failed to meet its target to halt biodiversity loss by 2010. Furthermore, the mid-term review of the current 2020 Biodiversity Strategy concluded that, although there has been progress in many areas, the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services is continuing, such that the EU will again miss its overall headline target and each of the six more specific targets that underpin it.

In our policy paper, we argue that the EU needs to establish a post-2020 EU biodiversity framework that is ambitious, comprehensive, yet credible and achievable, and provide some suggestions about the building blocks on which it could be based. The paper is built on a review of publicly available evidence and a consultation with a select number of biodiversity professionals from national environmental assessment agencies, think tanks and NGOs.

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A post-2020 biodiversity target

After the EU's failures to halt biodiversity loss to date, simply postponing the target further to 2030 risks a loss of credibility. However, a target to halt biodiversity loss remains the right thing to do, and is consistent with global targets towards 2030 under the SDGs. The EU needs to demonstrate it can halt biodiversity loss within its own territory if it is to be a respected and influential player globally. EU policy and decision makers should therefore make sure to understand why the previous targets will not be met and to change their strategy accordingly where necessary.

An important reason for the EU's failure to halt biodiversity loss is that insufficient value is being placed on biodiversity across society and the economy, and EU biodiversity targets and strategies to meet them have insufficient ownership beyond the biodiversity community. There is a need for action to be driven by a broader social movement and a wider recognition of the need to take account of the value of biodiversity in decision making across the economy. A renewed vision and target could reflect this – for example:

“By 2030 the value of biodiversity and ecosystems will be recognised across the economy and society, and taken into account across all economic sectors and areas of policy, leading to the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services being halted.”

We argue that halting biodiversity loss should remain a commitment in its own right, while growing recognition of the value of natural capital and ecosystem services will be important in achieving it. Within a headline target, there is also a need for clear and SMART targets relating to particular outcomes for biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Policy options to achieve the target

In order to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2030, we suggest that policy action is needed in six main areas:

1. Building a social movement to halt biodiversity loss. This could be encouraged through action to: Inspire people about nature and biodiversity in order to deliver a social movement for change; Recognise the diversity of people's values and interests, enabling genuine stakeholder dialogue, while using appropriate language and methods of engagement to build consensus and motivate action; Reconnect an increasingly urbanised society with nature; and focus on the links between nature and major societal challenges, notably the enhancement of human health and wellbeing.

2. Stepping up action to implement existing EU policies. Actions in this area should include: Fully implementing the Birds and Habitats Directives, including the Natura 2000 network; Stepping up efforts to enforce EU environmental legislation and cross compliance; Implementing policies for the marine environment; Strengthening and prioritising commitments for ecosystem restoration; and implementing legislation on invasive alien species.

3. Strengthening and reforming EU policy frameworks. Our recommendations in this area include: further reforming the CAP; integrating biodiversity into forest management plans; defining and implementing plans for green infrastructure and ecosystem restoration; improving coherence between the climate/energy and biodiversity agendas; and defining EU policy on no net loss of biodiversity.

4. Making the EU budget work for biodiversity. There is a need to ensure that EU funds do not contribute to biodiversity loss, while increasing efforts to deliver more and smarter funding for biodiversity action.

5. Increasing EU action to tackle global biodiversity loss. The EU can continue and step up its role in efforts to address global biodiversity decline by: supporting international action, in particular through the CBD post-2020 biodiversity framework and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals; reducing the EU's global footprint on biodiversity; and strengthening links between the biodiversity and climate agendas.

6. Supporting EU action through better knowledge and evidence. Action to halt biodiversity loss needs to be informed and supported by efforts to: strengthen the evidence base relating to biodiversity and ecosystem services; invest in effective and sustainable monitoring systems; and undertake “Horizon scanning” to identify emerging threats and challenges and policy responses to them.

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