

YouPEC 2010

YouPEC European Youth PErpective Conference on Biodiversity



We, 150 active young people from 35 European countries, came together in Geel, Belgium for the 3rd European Youth Perspective Conference to discuss biodiversity issues. As youth, we are concerned about our future and the future of upcoming generations because we will be most negatively affected by anthropogenic biodiversity loss.

We are aware that every individual has to contribute to counteract biodiversity loss. However, the main causes of biodiversity decline cannot be met on a personal level. We need you, the decision makers of today, to take action on the biodiversity crisis...now!

Biodiversity is the variety of genomes, species, ecosystems and the interactions between them; these aspects cannot be separated. Due to these complex linkages, biodiversity should be addressed on a global scale. We are currently facing the sixth mass extinction of species with species being lost at a rate 1000 times faster than the natural background rate¹. The loss of biodiversity also has significant consequences for ecosystem services (the benefits people obtain from ecosystems²). The TEEB study³ showed that the benefits derived from these ecosystem services are usually neglected and under-valued in daily life because they lack monetary value.

It is problematic to objectively calculate the value of some ecosystem services as they are priceless, for example, in the case of judging the value of recreation or enjoying beautiful landscapes. Although the monetary valuation of ecosystem services is important in decision-making, it is also necessary to consider the conservation of ecosystems for their intrinsic value. Biodiversity rich ecosystems are more resilient and resistant to facing and adapting to a changing climate, acting as our insurance in an uncertain future.

In 2001, the EU set a target to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010, a goal they failed to achieve. We recognize the EU's progress on designing progressive biodiversity policies, but a general lack of implementation, insufficient funding, inadequate awareness and political will have limited the success of these policies. Regarding the EU's biodiversity targets for 2020 and vision for 2050, we,

¹ Secretariat of the Convention of Biological Diversity. *Biodiversity is life, biodiversity is our life*. Gincana 7. 2010.

² Millenium Ecosystem Assessment. *Millenium Ecosystem Assessment, Ecosystems and Human Well-Being : A framework for assessment*. Washington DC: World Ressources institute. 2003.

³ The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity. *TEEB for Policy Makers Summary -Responding to the Value of Nature*. 2009.

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representatives of European youth, urge all decision makers to consider and incorporate the following recommendations.

Education

Given the intrinsic value of biodiversity and the potential impact of its loss on our wellbeing, we believe that raising awareness of such environmental issues through education is of great importance. Although recent studies have shown an increase in the public's understanding of biodiversity issues, efforts to address biodiversity loss need to be carried out in a more practical manner. Since education is the building block of a sustainable society, we urge the EU to support the integration of biodiversity in the European education system. More hands-on educational programs need to be implemented to aid citizens in developing an informed attitude about the value and importance of biodiversity, as people have the right to be educated about the environment. This takes into consideration the positive effect of nature on mental and physical well-being.

Media can be a useful means of delivering strong messages on the importance of biodiversity, for example through advertising campaigns that are coherent with current EU legislation. We emphasize the need to ensure that advertisements are in line with awareness-raising campaigns. We see this and the use of all other available communication tools as central tools for mainstreaming the idea of ecological sustainability.

We would like to stress that every citizen has the right to be informed about and aware of EU biodiversity policies. There has to be the possibility to file complaints when this policy is not properly implemented. In this regard, we highlight the need to support the communication between the research community, policy makers and the public.

Biodiversity Policy

While current legislation addresses the problem of biodiversity loss within Europe, there has been a general lack of implementation among Member States. As a result, there has been a failure to protect European biodiversity as intended by the policies. In particular, the marine component of Natura 2000 remains incomplete and must be more rapidly implemented and effectively managed. We recommend that the EU more stringently enforce that Member States uphold their biodiversity policy commitments. We further urge the EU to motivate national governments to support local communities and authorities to take concrete actions towards protecting and conserving biodiversity by having small scale conservation projects alongside national protection activities.

Currently, there are gaps and inconsistencies in the geographic, taxonomic and temporal coverage of biodiversity indicators among Member States due to differences in data collection methodologies. We see the need to improve the quality and coherence of scientific data via a better standardization of indicators and agreed measures of biodiversity. Scientific research and monitoring the status and trends of biodiversity and ecosystem services need to be conducted to better the existing European biodiversity knowledge base.

Amongst the largest threats to European biodiversity are habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation. We hold it to be of utmost importance that the EU prioritizes the preservation of existing habitats,

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extends these areas, uses ecological corridors and green infrastructure and restricts further developments into valuable natural areas. Alongside these activities, the EU should encourage and support the restoration of degraded areas in cooperation with local and regional stakeholders.

We urge the EU to recognize the magnitude of the threat to biodiversity posed by invasive alien species and their potential to have drastic social and economic effects, e.g. on human health, fisheries, agriculture and food production⁴. Therefore, we support the EU's effort to develop a comprehensive policy on invasive species, moving beyond 'business as usual'. We encourage the creation of a European institution which would act as a platform for coordinating invasive species research and aid in the implementation of relevant policy measures.

Integration of Biodiversity into Other Policy Fields

European policies in the areas of climate change, land use and agricultural activities greatly affect biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation. Therefore, there is a pressing need to integrate biodiversity into the policies of the following areas in accordance with current best practices and scientific knowledge.

Agriculture and forestry

In support of the progress that has been made as a result of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), including a strong reduction in overproduction, we urge the EU to continue reforming the CAP and take the following considerations into account. We propose that a baseline of sustainability measures be introduced that requires farmers to uphold a set of minimum standards as a prerequisite for receiving funds. Furthermore, we suggest that a 'public money for public goods' scheme be established that financially supports farmers who contribute to conserving ecosystem services and biodiversity, i.e. sustainable, organic and high nature value (HNV) farming systems.

Biodiversity should be stimulated through the efficient and sustainable use of agricultural and pastoral land. By focusing on food crops instead of 'cash crops' (e.g. biofuels), more space for natural diversity can be created within these landscapes. We believe that sustainable agricultural practices promote self-sufficient production systems, efficiently use the available biodiversity and lead to a higher resilience of agro-ecosystems. We also suggest that more attention be given to the interlinkages between consumption patterns and biodiversity loss, for example the inefficient production of animal proteins and luxury products.

We recognize the importance of natural genetic and species diversity in crops and livestock breeds and believe that they should be maintained in order to facilitate a less problematic adaptation of agricultural systems to future changes in local conditions. At the same time, this diversity will enhance the surrounding biodiversity. In this regard and given the potential damage of genetically modified organisms (GMO) to European biodiversity as well as the lack of independent scientific data in this area, we encourage an EU-wide ban on GMOs. Instead, we recommend focusing on crop improvement through selective breeding.

We also acknowledge the importance of aquatic ecosystems and encourage the EU to support their conservation and restoration. Additionally, sustainable fisheries should be promoted.

⁴ European Commission. *Invasive alien species - Nature and Biodiversity*. 2009.

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We urge politicians to halt the on-going decline in forest biodiversity by managing forests in a more sustainable way. Given the importance of wilderness areas, we recommend that 10% of European forest are left without human intervention. We also encourage the use of endemic and diverse species in forestry and discourage the use of monocultures and plantations. We recommend that the current management policy be adapted to support biodiversity in forests, for example by avoiding clear-cutting leading to habitat fragmentation and leaving dead wood in forests.

Land use

We propose that the EU take all possible measures to minimize pollution, eutrophication (caused by excessive nutrient loads) and the overexploitation of natural resources. Taking into consideration the integral role of soils in all ecosystems, we also urge the EU to protect them in order to retain their function and diversity.

Given the expected effects of climate change on the hydrological cycle, we further recommend that river flood plains and wetlands be restored and land water quality be improved. Additionally, future spatial planning should take the needs of natural areas and conservation priorities into consideration. These actions will help to maintain suitable habitats and allow for the successful migration of species both within and outside of EU territory as a prerequisite for adaptation to changing global conditions. Therefore, we encourage the EU to uphold its responsibility to protect global biodiversity by focusing on migratory species and the EU's overseas territories.

Biodiversity can help natural systems and vulnerable populations to cope with a shift in environmental conditions as a result of global change. Thus, we believe that a special focus should be given to programs that offer co-benefits by addressing biodiversity conservation and climate change simultaneously.

Funding

According to the European Union's Environmental Council⁵, one of the reasons for not achieving the 2010 biodiversity target was insufficient funding. Unfortunately, the distribution of EU funding was not appropriate for any of the EU's biodiversity categories, i.e. Natura 2000, biodiversity outside Natura 2000, monitoring and national biodiversity research. The European Environmental Agency⁶ concluded that only a ridiculous 0,1% of the EU's budget was spent for LIFE funding. The 2020 target is doomed to fail if funding for biodiversity is not increased to a sufficient level.

Therefore, we call on the EU to increase both direct and indirect funding for biodiversity. We recommend that Natura 2000 should be appropriately financed and funding from LIFE+ be made more easily accessible. Furthermore, we suggest that a fixed percentage of the second pillar of CAP funds

⁵ European Environmental Council meeting on March 15th 2010. European Commission. *Communication from the commission to the European parliament, the council, the European economic and social committee and the committee of the regions -Options for an EU vision and target for biodiversity beyond 2010*. Brussels. 2010.

⁶ European Environmental Agency (2010): EU 2010 Biodiversity Baseline Report . European Environmental Agency. *EU 2010 Biodiversity Baseline - Post-2010 Biodiversity policy*. 2010.

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be earmarked for Natura 2000 sites. Specifically, additional funding for biodiversity conservation in the CAP reform should be created by introducing a baseline for sustainable farming and 'public money for public goods'.

Biodiversity funding needs to be an overall priority for governments and should not be sidelined by short-term economic thinking. We recommend that subsidies, financial aid and investments that are harmful to biodiversity, e.g. those from the agricultural and energy sectors, be immediately eliminated as they are contradictory to any ambitious biodiversity policy. We also encourage the EU to engage the private sector, businesses and other stakeholders in an effort to develop an innovative green economy that stimulates prosperity and diminishes the harmful impacts humans currently have on ecosystems. Furthermore, we are deeply concerned about the discussions surrounding biodiversity offsetting; biodiversity has an intrinsic value and can never be recreated in the same way.

We believe the EU should more stringently apply the 'polluter-pays principle'. As illustrated by the recent BP incident in the Gulf of Mexico, the EU should encourage companies to have insurance against potential risks and damages so that in the event of an ecological disaster they can be held financially responsible and pay all costs.

The EU's International Responsibility

Europe is becoming increasingly dependent on imported resources and is currently consuming twice as much as it can produce. In fact, the European ecological footprint increased by 33% during the last 40 years⁷. Consequently, Europe's consumption has had and continues to have a high impact on biodiversity, ecosystems and indigenous people in other parts of the world⁸.

Significant progress is being made in European biodiversity policy; this legislation has the potential to act as a good model and aid the EU in leading by example in the international community in the field of biodiversity. In the same vein, we welcome the IPBES, but believe it should be used as a resource for coordinating international biodiversity conservation efforts.

During the CBD COP10 in Nagoya, the EU and the Belgian presidency should show leadership and focus on securing strong global targets for 2020 and an ambitious vision for 2050 as well as adopting a comprehensive protocol on access and benefit sharing.

2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity and we all need to seize the opportunity and make this year a turning point in biodiversity policy. Now is the time to act...

You are the leaders of today - ensure there is still a reason to be the leaders of tomorrow.

⁷ Global footprint Network, 2008

⁸ European Youth Perspective. *Declaration of the YouPEC on consumption*. Bakkum. 2008.