



Biodiversity

ESSENTIAL TO LIFE

Communications Programme 2009–2016 for
Saving Nature for People - National Strategy
and Action Plan

Introduction

The loss of biodiversity is increasing throughout the world, including in Finland. In order to stop this deterioration and safeguard biodiversity, the contribution of the whole of society is required, including private individuals, businesses, NGOs and the public administration.

A number of principles and actions aimed at combating the loss of biodiversity are defined in *Saving Nature for People – National Strategy and Action Plan* approved by the Finnish Government in its decision in principle of 21 December 2006. This national action plan implements the United Nations' Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

The importance of conserving biodiversity is also emphasised in the Government Programme of Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen's second Cabinet, according to which "the strategy for the preservation of biodiversity and sustainable development will be implemented with the aim of halting and reversing the decline in biodiversity".

The implementation of the goals of the *Saving Nature for People* action plan requires strong communications support. One of the strategic goals of this action plan is the strengthening of cooperation between various actors, upon which communications are also built.

According to a Eurobarometer survey¹ conducted in the autumn of 2007, Europeans are relatively well aware of the fact that biodiversity is declining. Furthermore, biodiversity as a concept has become generally known. However, many Europeans do not believe that the impoverishment of nature will directly affect their lives, Finns being the least concerned nation in this respect.

Finns respect nature and enjoy spending time there. For us, the important aspects of nature include silence, beautiful scenery, an escape from stress, opportunities for physical exercise, and "feeling in a good mood". We are perhaps one of the nations in the European Union that are closest to nature.² Despite this, or perhaps for this very reason, we are also the European nation which is least concerned about biodiversity. This applies both to our own country and the entire planet. Maybe we, as the inhabitants of a country with abundant natural assets, do not recognise extensive changes that are taking place gradually and do not have an immediate effect on our daily experiences. On the other hand, Finns are comparatively active in tackling the degradation of nature if it takes place in their local environment.

The Eurobarometer results pose a major communications challenge: to make Finns aware of the consequences of the continuing impoverishment of biodiversity as well as to make them take measures to rectify the situation. On the other hand, every summer there is lively discussion in Finland about non-native plants and animals, among other things. Biodiversity communications has a lot to contribute to other topical issues as well; for instance, it is extremely important to bring out the connection between climate change and the loss of biodiversity.

This communications programme is directed at a range of administrative sectors and interest groups that operate in the field of biodiversity. The programme presents the core messages, key communication channels, partners and target groups for biodiversity communications. On the basis of this communications programme, the various players involved can plan their own communications in more detail if they so wish.

This communications programme was compiled, and will be updated as needed, by the Communication Experts Group for Biodiversity Matters appointed by the Ministry of the Environment on 20 November 2007. The group consists mainly of communication specialists from the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Finnish Environment Institute, the Nature Services of Metsähallitus (the Finnish Forest and Park Service) and YLE (the Finnish Broadcasting Company). Furthermore, the communications group will draw up the annual plan for biodiversity communications.

Goals

The aim of the communications programme is to promote interest in, and increase awareness of, the ecological basis of biodiversity and of the importance and benefits of the conservation and sustainable use of nature for the national economy, business and individuals. The purpose is to disseminate information even on difficult issues and aspects of biodiversity in a manner which motivates the various parties to take active measures towards a shared goal.

In particular, it is important to involve various communications-related interest groups in planning and implementing communications that support the implementation of the national biodiversity strategy and action plan.

The purpose of these communications is to make the *Saving Nature for People* action plan and its goals well known. The purpose of internal communications, on the other hand, is to make the various administrative sectors aware of the responsibilities placed upon them in the programme. The need for communications and ways of targeting them as precisely as possible are being evaluated separately in connection with each measure related to the *Saving Nature for People* action plan. When planning individual communication measures, it is also evaluated whether the aim of communications is to influence knowledge, attitudes or prevailing practices.³

The challenge of communications is to make biodiversity visible. People should realise that natural diversity can be found at everybody's front door - both in cities and the countryside. We should emphasise outcomes that will benefit people if they, for example, protect species native to Finland. Simultaneously, we must inform the public of more extensive problems in store for humankind, if it fails to protect biodiversity, as well as provide a clear picture of the present state of nature in Finland. However, the general tone of biodiversity communications should be optimistic and build confidence in the fact that we can still influence the situation.

Furthermore, biodiversity communications should answer the question why we Finns should care about the fact that nature is destroyed in faraway developing countries.

1 In the autumn of 2007, the European Commission's Directorate-General for the Environment commissioned a Eurobarometer survey charting the attitudes of Europeans towards the issue of biodiversity. Over 25,000 Europeans from 27 member states were interviewed.

2 The national inventory of the recreational use of nature (LVVI 1991–2000).

3 Communication, Education and Public Awareness – A Toolkit for National Focal Points and NBSAP Coordinators. <http://www.cepatoolkit.org/>

Communication channels

The communication channels and measures available to all parties participating in biodiversity communications include:

- the Internet campaigns
- various events, particularly those organised in the midst of nature
- production of materials
- expert services
- “operational communications” (information bulletins and informative events)
- cooperation with stakeholder groups
- internal communications

Biodiversity communications group's operating principles

Since different players have different communication interests, it is not always possible to create joint communications. The purpose of regular coordination is to ensure that the parties participating in cooperation do not send contradictory messages or do overlapping work. The parties represented in the working group will cooperate in their communication activities whenever possible and whenever this promotes successful communications.

Biodiversity Communications Group's tasks:

- The parties represented in the communications group are responsible for increasing biodiversity awareness in their own administrative sector and area of responsibility as well as for presenting the biodiversity goals specified in the national strategy and action plan in as many communication policies and outputs as possible and that contradictory messages are not sent out.
- The Heads of Communications of the parties represented in the Communications Group shall ensure that the persons responsible for the various biodiversity-related agreements are familiar with the jointly agreed communication policies.
- The Biodiversity Communications Group will convene on a regular basis in order to review the communications status, challenges and successes of the organisations involved. This will ensure continuity of biodiversity communications, the sharing of best practice and the identification of new cooperation opportunities. The Group will update and further define the biodiversity communications programme and draw up an annual communication plan.
- Project Manager Marja Pylvänäinen from the Finnish Environment Institute will begin work as the Coordinator of Biodiversity Communications between the various ministries involved as of the beginning of 2010.
- In biodiversity communications, the aim is to utilise existing structures, including communications on natural resources, the National Resources Strategy (coordinated by Sitra), the Environmental Administration Communications Steering Group, and the communications network for the Finnish Inventory Programme for the Underwater Marine Environment (VELMU).

- The key partners in biodiversity communications will be invited to a joint discussion event at least once a year. The Communications Group will monitor and, if possible, participate in international biodiversity communications, with a particular focus on measures related to 2010.

Communication partners and target groups

The Biodiversity Communications Group has evaluated potential communication partners and target groups as well as various types of publicity. These communication partners provide particular approaches to biodiversity while covering issues that are of interest to them.

In a successful partnership, cooperation in communications may also trigger new thinking on problems related to the underlying subject matter and possible solutions to these.

With respect to *citizen journalism*, the most important communication partners include NGOs, in particular those focusing on environmental and nature protection. These organisations' strengths include networking, efficient and modern communications, expertise and the ability to handle broad themes. One of the immediate development priorities in Finland is communications cooperation between environmental organisations and the Government. Ideally, this cooperation could enable a partial “outsourcing” of responsibility for communications in areas where public authorities and NGOs have shared goals. Simultaneously, we must also acknowledge the NGOs' freedom to disagree with the Government's communication policies. Consequently, both parties must focus on managing any potential divergence of interests.

Some NGOs in the field of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity represent amateurs who have a personal interest in natural ecosystem services (nature as a hobby, hiking, gathering and use of natural products, hunting, fishing etc.). Through a communication partnership with these NGOs, it should be possible to reach citizens interested in nature who are also prepared to defend their rights. Furthermore, many organisations have close international links which should enable in-depth treatment of biodiversity issues.

Government communication measures can also be targeted directly at citizens, in which case it is the task of each administrative sector to define its target groups. For example, educational administration has efficient channels to children and adolescents, defence administration reaches almost the entire demographic group of young (male) adults, and the efficient communication channels of agriculture and forestry administration reach entrepreneurs whose daily activities have a particular significance for nature.

In *expert publicity*, political decision-making organisations play a particularly important role. In this type of communications, it is important to concentrate on matters relevant to decision-making as well as on the interpretation of recent scientific information and the highlighting of the political aspects of this information. Improving the interaction between the scientific community and the various decision-making bodies can be regarded as one of the fundamental prerequisites of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

In Finland, trade unions and industry interest groups traditionally play a major role as opinion influencers. The importance of biodiversity issues in the operations of these communication partners essentially depends on whether the advantages and disadvantages of biodiversity are linked to the key goals of these organisations in a comprehensible way. In this respect, the challenges posed by trade unions and industry interest groups to Government communications are similar to those posed by NGOs.

In Finland, biodiversity threats are largely related to land use. In this respect, institutional land owners (such as the church, municipalities and foundations) constitute an interesting communication partner. The ideological principles behind the operations of institutional land owners, or the obligations placed upon them by society, may form a framework in which biodiversity has a role to play. Furthermore, it may be in their interest to communicate, in a credible way, that they take responsibility for natural values within their control.

In the implementation of communications, it is important to identify which types of media a specific partner uses. While *media publicity* may be well suited for expert publicity, *internet publicity* plays a key role in the activities of NGOs. Internet publicity is also the best channel for reaching young people and highly-educated target groups.

In the case of many communication partners, it is very important that biodiversity related matters be taken up in their *internal publicity*. More extensive participation in communication cooperation is not even possible without motivating one's own players first. Partners' intra-industry communications may be more effective than the mass media in reaching certain groups of citizens with a common interest.

Internationality is a key element of biodiversity issues. For example, in Finland's development policy, biodiversity plays a major and increasing role in the elimination of poverty, maintenance of peace and defence of human rights. Many initiatives and obligations related to biodiversity conservation originate from international fora, in particular within the framework of the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity. Finns' awareness of this cooperation is modest and they may also easily regard outside influence as a diktat or as unsuited to Finnish circumstances. This applies in particular to the European Union's biodiversity policy.

Nordic cooperation is particularly important due to our shared history and borders. We also share a nature that does not recognise national borders. Together we can communicate the special characteristics of the biodiversity of Nordic nature and the related problems that need to be solved to, for instance, the European Union.

Core messages and supportive messages

Core messages support and clarify communications and stakeholder group work. These messages will be updated as necessary. If a group contains several messages, the main core message is in bold.

Core message:

Biodiversity – essential to life

Messages by target group:

To businesses

- **In the long run, awareness of the prerequisites, conditions and limitations of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity is a prerequisite of sustainable business operations.**
- Customers and, increasingly, shareholders and financiers, are interested in the effects of business operations on biodiversity.
- Particular interest is being paid to industries that influence biodiversity at some point of production. Appropriate acceptance of responsibility will also safeguard demand for products and services.
- Failures in the sustainable use of biodiversity are extremely difficult to correct through communications but it is worthwhile to communicate successes and best practices.
- The Business and Biodiversity Initiative provides businesses with opportunities to interact with the various communication partners as well as identify significant business leads.

To decision-makers

- **The loss of biodiversity is a political and economic threat comparable to climate change.**
- The decline of biodiversity is far more costly to mankind than its conservation.
- According to expert estimates, this decline will reduce global GDP by 7 per cent a year by 2050 (the so-called Stern Review on Biodiversity).
- The decline of biodiversity must be halted quickly since the future and wellbeing of mankind is dependent on it. For example, fishing as a global trade is forecast to collapse unless the present trend is reversed.
- The decline of biodiversity is a threat comparable to climate change, increasing the instability of the business environment.
- Finland is committed to combating the loss of biodiversity.
- Finland has promised to support the capabilities of developing countries to examine, manage and control their natural resources.
- Finland is committed to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity on a global basis.
- Current research on biodiversity must be taken into account all decision-making.

To researchers

- **The scientific community must be prepared to take the initiative in generating interaction with decision-makers.**
- Research data and interdisciplinary cooperation regarding biodiversity is needed.

To citizens

- **Biodiversity – essential to life**
- Biodiversity starts in your own garden.
- The future of Finnish plants and animals is in our own hands.
- Finnish nature is unique – you cannot buy it from a supermarket or order it from the internet.
- You can influence biodiversity through your own consumption habits.
- Life on Earth is based on biodiversity.
- Natural diversity promotes mental and physical well-being.

Core messages by theme groups:

Forestry

- **A forest owner benefits from care and maintenance of the natural forest.**
- Diverse forests are good for Man and nature.
- Diverse forests produce oxygen and soak up carbon.

Agriculture

- **Diverse agriculture safeguards a beautiful and productive rural environment.**
- Diversity flows all the way from agriculture to the table.
- A diverse rural environment pays tribute to the work of past generations.
- Original species preserve a unique genotype.

The Baltic Sea and water systems

- **The “sickness” of the Baltic Sea represents another form of biodiversity loss.**
- The cleaning of the Baltic Sea is vital for maintaining a living sea.
- Respect nature when spending time in your holiday home: the seashore provides a place where water, land and the relaxing human being can meet. We all appreciate natural diversity, but we must take care of it.
- The diversity of our aquatic nature is a special asset worth cherishing in Finland.

Fells

- Climate change reduces fell nature through the encroachment of forests onto fell meadows.
- If climate warming continues, we will lose our fell nature.

Mires and wetlands

- Mires and wetlands are vital for migratory birds.
- Drainage and peat production destroy mires.

Economy

- Biodiversity boosts the national economy.
- Lost animal species and habitats cannot be restored at any cost.
- It is worth combating biodiversity loss now since in the future the costs will multiply and it may turn out to be impossible.

Global

- **Poor people in developing countries are the innocent victims of global crises.**
- The poorest people in the world are the most dependent on biodiversity.
- Natural diversity protects against natural catastrophes and limits climate change.
- Sustainable use of natural resources prevents people becoming environmental refugees and supports international stability.
- Poverty in developing countries can be reduced through the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.
- Deforestation and desertification expose developing countries to serious water and food crises.
- Finland also benefits from a global adoption of responsibility. The wellbeing of the ecosystems of all countries promotes global safety and stability.
- Nature and the whole variety of species have a value in themselves and the right to exist.

Monitoring and assessment

The Biodiversity Communications Group monitors individual communication measures and the implementation of the annual communication plan in order to ensure that resources are used both efficiently properly in line with the focal areas of the *Saving Nature for People* action plan. In its evaluation work, the Group considers the targeting and scheduling of projects as well verifying that projects are realistic. Feedback on the various events is collected and utilised in the planning of future events and projects.

The awareness of key partners, target groups and the media about themes related to biodiversity will be monitored every few years intervals, for example, by use of a barometer. In this connection, attention will be paid to, for instance, the clarity and timing of communications and the adequacy of detail contained in them.