

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on ‘The biodiversity policy of the EU’**(own initiative opinion)**

(2016/C 487/03)

Rapporteur: **Lutz RIBBE**

Plenary Assembly decision	21/01/2016
Legal basis	Rule 29(2) of the Rules of Procedure
	Own-initiative opinion
Section responsible	Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment
Adopted in section	05/09/2016
Adopted at plenary	21/09/2016
Plenary session No	519
Outcome of vote	156/31/22
(for/against/abstentions)	

1. Summary of the EESC's conclusions and recommendations

1.1. The EU's biodiversity policy is a classic example of a policy of unkept promises at European and national level, despite the fact that the policy has correctly identified the problems and put in place the necessary tools.

1.2. The EESC draws particular attention to the Commission's comments on the importance of protecting biodiversity, which it compares to climate protection. This is not just about conserving animal and plant species: it concerns the very conditions of human existence.

1.3. The EESC calls for consistent and immediate implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives. The same goes for the Water Framework Directive, whose consistent and immediate implementation would in the EESC's view make a considerable contribution to improving biodiversity protection.

1.4. The Member States must finally determine actual financial needs arising from the implementation of EU law, and the Commission must make the necessary funding available. Financing of Natura 2000 through Community funds and primarily the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) can be considered to have failed in many respects, and the EESC therefore calls for a separate budget heading to be introduced under which financing for the Natura 2000 network must be made available.

1.5. The EESC calls for coherence to be ensured between all policy areas that have implications for biodiversity protection. In this connection, the EESC would hope that the mid-term review of the 'ecological focus areas' and a possible mid-term review of the CAP are already being used to ensure that the CAP is in future used in a more targeted way to achieve the biodiversity objectives. In the EESC's view this would currently require a change in the scope and quality of the ecological focus areas.

1.6. The strengthening of Green Infrastructure is explicitly welcomed. Here, the Committee calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop and implement a consistent Green Infrastructure strategy. The EU should also make the trans-European networks for green infrastructure (TEN-G) an investment priority. Here too there is an urgent need for earmarked resources.

1.7. The inconsistencies in EU policies have been noted and criticised on numerous occasions by Commission departments, the Environment Council, the European Parliament, the CoR and the EESC, and there has been no substantial change in this respect in recent years. However, if the EU's own proposals for solving biodiversity problems are not taken seriously and implemented, it is hardly surprising that a) the desired outcomes are not being achieved and b) disappointment is spreading among interested parties and in society.

1.8. In hindsight, the EU's various biodiversity strategies and biodiversity programmes from 1998, 2001, 2006 and 2010, each of which accurately described the problems and set out appropriate tools, must therefore be regarded as largely futile, since they were not able to deliver on the political promise and to end the biodiversity loss caused by society.

1.9. The EESC therefore observes once again — as in a large number of its previous opinions on EU biodiversity — that it is political will that is lacking, not legal foundations. No change in the current legal basis is needed.

2. Background: the timeline of EU biodiversity policy — and reactions of the EESC

2.1. After it was noted in the 1998 Biodiversity Strategy ⁽¹⁾ that 'the rich biodiversity of the European Union has been subject to slow changes over the centuries, due to the impact of human activities' and that 'the scale of this impact has accelerated dramatically in the last few decades', in 2001 clear goals were set out in the Sustainable Development Strategy ('Gothenburg Agenda') adopted by the European Council, namely to halt the loss of biodiversity in the EU by 2010 and to take action to restore habitats and natural ecosystems.

2.2. To implement these goals a Biodiversity Action Plan ⁽²⁾ was issued in 2001, followed by a further Biodiversity Action Plan in May 2006 ⁽³⁾; however, in terms of content, the latter was barely distinguishable from the former.

2.3. In March 2010, the heads of state or government were forced to admit that they would not meet the commitment they had made in 2001, despite the various action plans which the EESC had deemed to be appropriate and constructive.

2.4. On the basis of the Commission Communication *Options for an EU vision and target for biodiversity beyond 2010* ⁽⁴⁾, a further, new *EU biodiversity strategy to 2020* ⁽⁵⁾ was consequently adopted, which in turn essentially only restated the old recommendations and instruments of the previous action plans and postponed to 2020 the target originally set for 2010.

2.5. It was optimistically declared in that document that 'the EU 2020 biodiversity strategy ... [sets] the EU on the right track to meet its own biodiversity objectives and its global commitments'.

2.6. The EESC also expressed its views on the strategy ⁽⁶⁾ and criticised it: among other things, it expressed considerable concern that 'politicians have not yet found the strength or the will to implement measures which have been acknowledged to be necessary for years, although the communication repeatedly makes the point that society and the economy will benefit equally from a stringent biodiversity policy. Not even the EU's central nature conservation directives have been fully implemented by the Member States — 19 or even 32 years after their entry into force.'

2.7. At the time the EESC felt it was 'not clear how the lack of political will can be remedied'. The Committee concluded: 'In this sense the biodiversity strategy now submitted does not represent real progress. The debates on the communication which have so far taken place in the Council of Ministers show that we are still a long way from integrating biodiversity policy into other policy areas'.

2.8. The Committee already believed that it was of utmost importance to link the forthcoming policy reform processes (e.g. in fisheries, agricultural, transport, energy and cohesion policy) closely with the biodiversity strategy. However, it still identified large deficits in this area and therefore concluded that 'the Commission must take its own biodiversity strategy more seriously!'

⁽¹⁾ COM(1998) 42 final.

⁽²⁾ COM(2001) 162 final.

⁽³⁾ COM(2006) 216 final.

⁽⁴⁾ COM(2010) 4 final.

⁽⁵⁾ COM(2011) 244 final.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 24, 28.1.2012, p. 111.

2.9. After just four years, the claim set out in the new EU biodiversity strategy — about having identified the right track and finally halting biodiversity loss — has little credibility. This can be seen very clearly from the mid-term review of the Biodiversity Strategy ⁽⁷⁾.

3. Mid-term review of the current biodiversity strategy

3.1. The strategy itself contains a total of six clearly defined targets and 20 measures. The mid-term review comments on the targets as follows:

3.1.1. Target 1 (Halt the deterioration in the status of all species and habitats covered by EU nature legislation and achieve a significant and measurable improvement in their status ...): although some progress has been made, it has been too slow to meet the target. In particular, there has not been sufficient progress with completing the Natura 2000 network for marine areas, guaranteeing effective management of Natura 2000 sites, and providing the necessary funding to support the Natura 2000 network. And even if the Natura 2000 network for terrestrial habitats is now 'largely' complete, in 2012 only 58 % of Natura 2000 sites had management plans in place or in development.

3.1.2. Target 2 (By 2020, ecosystems and their services are maintained and enhanced by establishing green infrastructure and restoring at least 15 % of degraded ecosystem): the measures taken so far have 'not yet halted the trend of degradation of ecosystems and services'.

3.1.3. Target 3 (*Increase the contribution of agriculture and forestry to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity*): there has been 'no significant overall progress'. And further: 'The continuing decline in the status of species and habitats of EU importance associated with agriculture indicates that greater efforts need to be made to conserve and enhance biodiversity in these areas. The common agricultural policy (CAP) has an essential role to play in this process in interaction with relevant environmental policies'. Although there are now a number of instruments in this area, these also need to be taken up by the Member States 'on a sufficient scale'. Only if these are deployed 'more broadly' will the EU still be able to reach its targets by 2020. Overall, 'much stronger efforts are needed'.

3.1.4. Target 4 (*Ensure the sustainable use of fisheries resources*): while 'significant progress has been made in setting the policy framework' ... 'policy implementation has been uneven across the EU and major challenges remain to ensure that the objectives are achieved according to schedule. Just over 50 % of MSY-assessed stocks were fished sustainably in 2013'. A negative trend can still be noted in all (!) European seas.

3.1.5. Target 5 (*Combat invasive alien species*): this is the only target for which the EU is 'on track' and expects that the 2020 target can be achieved.

3.1.6. Target 6 (*Help avert global biodiversity loss*): '... progress is insufficient in reducing the impacts of EU consumption patterns on global biodiversity' and '... existing efforts may not be sufficient to meet the Aichi Biodiversity Targets by the deadlines'.

3.2. This very sobering mid-term review was issued just at the time when the European Commission was considering substantially revising the most important EU directives on nature protection, namely the 1979 Birds Directive and the 1992 Habitats Directive.

3.3. The expert reports ⁽⁸⁾ accompanying the Fitness Check of the Birds and Habitats Directives confirm what the EESC has been repeating insistently for years: the legal framework is adequate and cannot be blamed for the failure to meet the biodiversity protection targets. Critical shortcomings are non-implementation of measures, the lack of a nature protection budget and the inconsistency of EU policy in this area.

⁽⁷⁾ COM(2015) 478 final.

⁽⁸⁾ Milieu, IEEP and ICF, *Evaluation Study to support the Fitness Check of the Birds and Habitats Directives*, March 2016.

4. General comments

4.1. The EESC reiterates its point that in the EU, 'when it comes to maintaining biodiversity there is no shortage of laws, directives, programmes, model projects, political declarations or recommendations, but there is a lack of implementation and concerted action at all political levels'. This view is borne out not just by the evaluation study, but also by the conclusions of the Environment Council of 16 December 2015 ⁽⁹⁾, which did not differ fundamentally from those of the 2011 Environment Council. As long as the directives are not implemented fully, as long as sufficient financial resources are not made available or used, and as long as other EU policies are not consistently geared to biodiversity needs, it will not be possible to achieve the desired results.

4.2. New strategy papers or action plans and/or the review of the legal framework do not change this, rather they feign policy-making activity, which is bound to lead to nothing if the actual problems of non-implementation are not remedied.

4.3. In order to be successful in maintaining biodiversity, a number of approaches are necessary.

4.4. *Establishing the Natura 2000 network*

4.4.1. The Natura 2000 network is absolutely crucial for 'traditional' nature conservation, such as the preservation of rare flora and fauna and unique biotopes (e.g. bogs, dry habitats, remains of semi-natural forest). It is based primarily on the 1992 Habitats Directive and the special protection areas for birds introduced under the 1979 Birds Directive.

4.4.2. With the adoption of the Habitats Directive in particular, both the Member States and the Commission made two pledges:

— to complete the Natura 2000 network within three years ⁽¹⁰⁾; and

— to provide funding for this purpose, so as not to leave landowners or land users picking up the tab.

4.4.3. The network was supposed to have been completed in 1995, more than 20 years ago. The designation of most sites has now been carried out, with 18 % of the land area of the EU designated as Natura 2000 sites, however designation alone is not enough. Many sites still do not enjoy permanent legal protection and only slightly more than half have management plans. Yet until it is clear for the general public and administrations, and in particular for landowners and land users, what is now permitted or prohibited, there can be no successful nature conservation, nor will it be possible to guarantee compensation for any potential restrictions on use.

4.4.4. It is telling that the Council of Environment Ministers on 19 December 2011 encouraged the Member States — and thereby itself — 'to complete, in a timely manner, the establishment of the Natura 2000 network, develop and implement management plans or other equivalent instruments ... thereby establishing a solid basis for strategic planning with a view to subsequent implementation of the MFF 2014-2020'. What should actually have been finished twenty years ago was in 2011 once again called for in a 'timely manner' — and to this day has not been completed!

4.4.5. Thus, on 16 December 2015 the Environment Council again urged the Member States and thus in turn itself to 'complete the establishment of the Natura 2000 network'.

⁽⁹⁾ Council of the European Union, document No 15389/15.

⁽¹⁰⁾ The three-year period (i.e. 1992-1995) concerned the notification of Natura sites by the Member States. This notification process is still not complete in some cases.

4.5. *Measures outside protected areas*

4.5.1. The Commission, the Environment Council and the European Parliament⁽¹¹⁾ quite rightly emphasise that biodiversity policy is not only about the protection of animal and plant species and habitats, but also concerns people's production bases and livelihoods. Just one of many examples of this are pollination services provided by insects such as bees or butterflies, whose economic value — not only for agriculture — is immeasurable. However, the Commission had to concede that: 'Europe's ecosystem services are judged to be of mixed status or degraded — i.e. no longer able to deliver the optimal quality and quantity of basic services such as crop pollination, clean air and water ...' ⁽¹²⁾.

4.5.2. Pollinators or decomposers, but also many other species, and their services, cannot be conserved by focusing solely on the designation of protected areas. The EU's biodiversity policy must therefore also establish requirements across the board, as well as for protected areas; and in this respect consistency with land-use policy plays a key role.

4.5.3. It is quite right for both the Commission and the Council to keep emphasising the significance of for example the agriculture sector, most recently in the mid-term review: The Council 'notes with concern that agriculture is one of the most prominent pressures on terrestrial ecosystems and that there has been no measurable improvement in the status of agriculture-related habitats and species covered by the Habitats Directive until 2012 and regrets the significant declines of farmland birds, grassland butterflies and pollination services, which underline continuing pressures from the agricultural sector mainly due to intensification and abandonment of agricultural land' ⁽¹³⁾.

4.6. *Inconsistency of EU policies*

4.6.1. In the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020, it was stressed the strategy is 'an integral part of the Europe 2020 Strategy' ⁽¹⁴⁾; however, the concepts 'biodiversity', 'habitats', 'nature conservation' or 'protection of species', and 'protection of the diversity of genetic resources' or 'ecosystem', do not feature even once in the Europe 2020 Strategy. Only 'diversity of species' is touched on briefly in two places, under the theme of 'resource efficiency'. For the EESC it is therefore completely incomprehensible that the European Commission could make such a claim, and its actual policy also bears out the exact opposite.

4.6.2. And yet, given that the EU's 2001 Sustainable Development Strategy no longer plays any real role in policy terms, the Europe 2020 strategy would be precisely the right framework for addressing the problem. The EESC has frequently called on the economics and finance ministers to reflect on the economic significance of biodiversity loss ⁽¹⁵⁾. This has still not happened.

4.6.3. As the objectives of the EU nature protection directives and the EU biodiversity strategy also reflect internationally agreed goals — e.g. the Aichi targets under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — there is an urgent need for biodiversity policy to be fully incorporated into the SDG implementation strategy or into a new EU sustainable development strategy.

4.6.4. However, so far biodiversity policy has continued to be viewed by many Commission departments and some EU Councils of Ministers more as a competing policy area that partially blocks or hampers economic development and also ties up funding.

4.6.5. But the fact is undeniable: there are conflicts between different types of resource use, and occasionally interference with the ecosystem is prohibited, for example by the nature protection directives. However, this is precisely the role of nature conservation, namely for government action to ensure that there is a balance between economic use and preservation of natural resources. In this sense, there is no difference between nature conservation and other policy areas where the free play of market forces is subject to regulatory measures.

⁽¹¹⁾ See for example the European Parliament resolution of 2 February 2016 on the mid-term review of the EU's Biodiversity Strategy (2015/2137(INI)).

⁽¹²⁾ COM(2010) 548 final, 8.10.2010, p. 3.

⁽¹³⁾ Council of the European Union document No 15389/2015, point 36.

⁽¹⁴⁾ COM(2011) 244 final, p. 2.

⁽¹⁵⁾ OJ C 48, 15.2.2011, p. 150, point 2.3.

4.6.6. The absence of any real consistency between classical economic policy and environmental policies is nothing new. As far back as 2006, the EESC lamented 'the huge gulf that has grown up between ideal and reality' and the fact that public 'planning decisions and support schemes are often instrumental in imperilling biodiversity still further' ⁽¹⁶⁾.

4.6.7. A key reason for this trade-off is the tension between individual interests, in particular economic interests, and the public interest. The EU's message to date has suggested a commitment to biodiversity protection in the public interest. In that case, the consistent course of action would be to determine, and enforce, constraints to contain economic interests that compromise biodiversity protection.

4.7. *Agricultural policy/agriculture*

4.7.1. The EESC has already addressed the relationship between agriculture, the common agricultural policy and biodiversity on several occasions, noting that the gradual but large-scale and continuing decline in biodiversity is happening despite the fact that farmers are overwhelmingly complying with prevailing law. In other words, it is happening within the limits of the law, when employing supposedly good agricultural practice. This situation cannot be changed by reforming nature protection law, but only through changes in utilisation practices combined with a revised agricultural funding policy. The EESC refers here to its own-initiative opinion on *Reform of the common agricultural policy in 2013* ⁽¹⁷⁾, which describes in detail the changes it deems necessary.

4.7.2. The Commission is very aware of the importance of farming, noting that 'the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is the policy tool having the most significant impacts on biodiversity in rural areas. ... One of the setbacks as regards biodiversity was the abolition of compulsory set-aside' ⁽¹⁸⁾. Thus agricultural policy still often conflicts with biodiversity policy, even though parts of the CAP, especially the agri-environmental programmes under the second pillar, demonstrate how these contradictions can be addressed.

4.7.3. Set-aside was introduced in the mid-1980s, not to improve the ecological stability of farmland but to reduce surpluses. With the CAP reform of 2013, the idea of farming some agricultural land less intensively was revisited. 'Ecological focus areas' became mandatory in the context of 'greening' the CAP. However, there was a heated debate surrounding a) the scope and b) what was to be understood by ecological focus.

4.7.4. Now, for example, the cultivation of leguminous plants or cash crops fall under the definition of 'ecological focus'. While the increase in the number of areas where leguminous or cash crops are cultivated is in principle to be welcomed, these measures will not make any real contribution to improving biodiversity. And the fact that the use of pesticides is to some extent permitted in ecological focus areas is diametrically opposed to the intention of greening agricultural policy: pesticides do not help to increase biodiversity but rather limit it.

4.7.5. The Commission should carry out, as soon as possible, an initial assessment of the impact of the measures adopted, particularly since 'greening' has become one of the main justifications for maintaining agricultural payments from the EU budget.

4.7.6. Moreover, following these assumptions, the horizontal policies of the EU, in particular with regard to RDI, should also take account of and pay particular attention to the contribution that research, development and innovation applied to agriculture can make to improving biodiversity in the EU.

⁽¹⁶⁾ OJ C 195, 18.8.2006, p. 96.

⁽¹⁷⁾ OJ C 354, 28.12.2010, p. 35.

⁽¹⁸⁾ COM(2010) 548 final, p. 5.

4.8. Green infrastructure

4.8.1. The Habitats Directive has a critical technical flaw: although its Article 10 explicitly refers to the importance of contiguity of landscape features, there is no binding mechanism that would lead to a consistent biotope network system in Europe. In its Communication on Green Infrastructure, the Commission outlines how these deficits can be rectified through appropriate investment in maintaining and restoring Green Infrastructure, on both a large and small scale. In view of this, it is very important that a consistent strategy for Green Infrastructure should be adopted and implemented. A central plank of this strategy should be a methodological framework and financing instrument for trans-European biodiversity networks (TEN-G). This applies for both large-scale measures and small-scale measures, e.g. in agricultural landscapes.

4.9. Comments on policy in the Member States and potential candidate countries

4.9.1. In many Member States and candidate countries, serious destruction of nature is still taking place. To name but a few examples:

4.9.2. In Romania, the area covered by primeval forest at the time of EU accession was more than 2 000 km². Almost all of this area consists of designated Natura 2000 sites. Since then, large-scale clear-felling in Romania's old-growth forests has been documented, causing irreplaceable loss of European natural heritage.

4.9.3. River ecosystems in the Balkans, and in particular in the Western Balkan countries, are by far the richest in Europe. Around one third of the rivers in the successor states to the former Yugoslavia and in Albania have a natural dynamic and may still be described as natural rivers. The documented plan for more than 2 700 (!) hydro-electric power plants, at least one third of them in protected areas, poses a serious threat to the biodiversity and the natural dynamic of all rivers in the Balkans. Public funding is being used to finance these projects. The biodiversity of almost all rivers has already been massively damaged in almost all the EU Member States, so that now considerable sums will have to be raised to renature them, including through implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive.

4.9.4. Numerous species of birds listed in Annex 1 of the Birds Directive and which are protected within the EU are being recklessly hunted in the candidate countries in the Balkans; bird hunting is also often an unresolved issue in many Member States. The shooting of Eurasian spoonbills, cranes, pygmy cormorants and ferruginous ducks, to name just a few species, will weaken the breeding population of these species in the EU.

4.10. Funding

4.10.1. A further problem touched on in both the mid-term review and the Council conclusions is that of funding, including funding for the Natura 2000 network. A Commission Communication of 2004⁽¹⁹⁾ addressed the issue of funding for the network, including a) the amount of resources required and b) the question of which funding source should be used to provide them. At that stage an estimated annual figure of EUR 6,1 billion was mentioned; it was decided not to set up a specific budget line or to expand the Life programme but instead to use mainly the second pillar of the CAP and other EU-funds.

4.10.2. The EESC had doubts about the amounts declared at the time and felt it was 'absolutely essential to present more precise cost calculations as quickly as possible'. It has doubts, 'for example, over whether the sums indicated in respect of the new Member States (EUR 0,3 billion, as opposed to EUR 5,8 billion for EU-15) will be sufficient'⁽²⁰⁾.

4.10.3. Nothing has happened in this regard to date: the same amount is still under discussion. The Member States responsible and the Commission have so far failed to clarify the situation.

⁽¹⁹⁾ COM(2004) 431 final.

⁽²⁰⁾ OJ C 221, 8.9.2005, p. 108, point 3.10.1.

4.10.4. At the time, the EESC pointed out the risk that financing Natura 2000 measures from the second pillar could lead to competition with other rural development measures ⁽²¹⁾. This has been borne out in two respects: firstly, payments from the second pillar were reduced by 30 % in the 2007-2013 financing period compared with the previous financing period and, secondly, as the European Court of Auditors and the Environment Council quite rightly pointed out, 'Member States did not always recognise the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) as a possible instrument for promoting biodiversity, while its potential for financing Natura 2000 was not sufficiently realised' ⁽²²⁾.

4.10.5. The European Commission ⁽²³⁾ has therefore had to concede that the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development remains the most important Community funding source for Natura 2000 and biodiversity in the EU, but that 'only 20 % of the total financing needs for managing protected areas including the Natura 2000 network in Europe are being met'.

4.10.6. Thus it is imperative that the exact financing need for implementing the EU nature protection directives be established and that the correct resources — specifically earmarked under a special budget heading (e.g. an extended LIFE budget) — be made available.

4.11. *Participation and involvement*

4.11.1. The shortcomings in the implementation of the EU's biodiversity strategy, particularly Natura 2000, can in part be attributed to a lack of civil society involvement and participation in the various protected areas. The designation of protected areas should be regarded in the first instance as an administrative act, to be carried out in full compliance with the principles of the rule of law; however, the management plans should be developed and implemented with the close involvement of landowners, land users, conservation organisations and local authorities. In many cases things have not been done in this way, which has often led to mistrust and hostility towards EU biodiversity policy.

Brussels, 21 September 2016.

*The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Georges DASSIS*

⁽²¹⁾ OJ C 221, 8.9.2005, p. 108, points 3.14.1. and 3.14.2.

⁽²²⁾ Environment Council of 16.12.15.

⁽²³⁾ COM(2010) 548 final, p. 13.

APPENDIX

The following amendments, which received at least a quarter of the votes cast, were rejected during the discussion:

Point 4.7.4 — Amend:

Now, for example, the cultivation of leguminous plants or cash crops fall under the definition of 'ecological focus'. ~~While the~~ The increase in the number of areas where leguminous or cash crops are cultivated is in principle to be welcomed, ~~these measures will not make any.~~ Enhancement of soil biota through symbiosis between rhizobia and leguminous plants, inter alia, can make a real contribution to improving biodiversity. ~~And the fact that the~~ The use of pesticides/plant protection products is to some extent permitted in ecological focus areas under strict European authorisation requirements and implementing rules; this allows the cultivation of protein plants in Europe to be promoted ~~is diametrically opposed to the intention of greening agricultural policy; pesticides do not help to increase biodiversity but rather limit it.~~

Reason

This measure is only in its second year of implementation. There are still no meaningful analyses available on biodiversity. The targeted use of plant protection products can make sense in some cases, such as to protect young crops that are not very competitive against weed infestation. Under Article 46 of Regulation No 1307/2013, the Commission has to submit a report on the implementation of ecological focus areas by March 2017.

Result of the vote

For 69

Against 96

Abstentions 26

Point 4.7.4 — Amend as follows:

Now, for example, the cultivation of leguminous plants or catch crops fall under the definition of 'ecological focus'. While the increase in the number of areas where leguminous or cash crops are cultivated is in principle to be welcomed, these measures will not make any real contribution to improving biodiversity. And the fact that the use of pesticides is to some extent permitted in ecological focus areas is diametrically opposed to the intention of greening agricultural policy: pesticides do not help to increase biodiversity but rather limit it. On the other hand there is a high deficit in EU-grown protein crops, and a general ban of pesticides on leguminous crops would make this deficit even more serious.

Reason

To be given orally.

Result of the vote

For 80

Against 105

Abstentions 11

Point 1.5 — Delete text:

The EESC calls for coherence to be ensured between all policy areas that have implications for biodiversity protection. In this connection, the EESC would hope that the mid-term review of the 'ecological focus areas' and a possible mid-term review of the CAP are already being used to ensure that the CAP is in future used in a more targeted way to achieve the biodiversity objectives. ~~In the EESC's view this would currently require a change in the scope and quality of the ecological focus areas.~~

Reason

The greening introduced in 2015 is now in only its second year of implementation. We therefore do not yet have any analyses that are reliable enough to allow sound conclusions to be drawn in this regard. Under Article 46 of Regulation (EC) No 1307/2013, the Commission has to present an evaluation report on the implementation of ecological focus areas by March 2017. The appropriate steps will then be determined on the basis of those evaluation results.

Result of the vote

For 57
Against 120
Abstentions 11

Point 1.5 — Amend as follows:

The EESC calls for coherence to be ensured between all policy areas that have implications for biodiversity protection. In this connection, the EESC would hope that the mid-term review of the 'ecological focus areas' and a possible mid-term review of the CAP are already being used to ensure that the CAP is in future used in a more targeted way to achieve the biodiversity objectives. In the EESC's view this would currently require a change in the scope and quality of the ecological focus areas, also ensuring that they can be better integrated into modern farming practices.

Reason

To be given orally.

Result of the vote

For 75
Against 118
Abstentions 9
