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P8_TA(2017)0441

Action Plan for nature, people and the economy

European Parliament resolution of 15 November 2017 on an Action Plan for nature, people and the economy (2017/2819(RSP))

(2018/C 356/06)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission communication entitled 'An Action Plan for nature, people and the economy' (COM(2017)0198),
 - having regard to its resolution of 2 February 2016 on the mid-term review of the EU's Biodiversity Strategy ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to the Fitness Check of the EU Nature Legislation (Birds and Habitats Directives) (SWD(2016)0472),
 - having regard to the European Court of Auditors Special Report No 1/2017 entitled 'More efforts needed to implement the Natura 2000 network to its full potential',
 - having regard to the Commission report entitled 'Reporting under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives 2007-2012: The State of Nature in the EU',
 - having regard to the Eurostat biodiversity statistics of November 2016,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions of 19 June 2017 on the EU Action Plan for nature, people and the economy ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to the question to the Commission on an Action Plan for nature, people and the economy (O-000067/2017 — B8-0608/2017),
 - having regard to Rules 128(5) and 123(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas approximately only half of protected bird species and a smaller number of other protected species and habitats in the Union currently have good conservation status, and whereas only 50 % of all Natura 2000 sites have management plans with conservation objectives and measures;
- B. whereas the Nature Directives have an important role to play in helping achieve the targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change;
- C. whereas the European Environment Agency assessment entitled '2015 State of Nature in the EU' states that the main pressures and threats to terrestrial ecosystems reported by Member States are agriculture and the modification of natural conditions, and are the use of living resources (fishing) and pollution in the case of marine ecosystems; whereas all of these are human activities and have a profound and damaging impact on nature;
- D. whereas the 2016 Eurostat biodiversity statistics show an overall decline in all 167 of the EU's common bird species between 1990 and 2014 ⁽³⁾;

⁽¹⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0034.

⁽²⁾ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/06/19/conclusions-eu-action-plan-nature/pdf>

⁽³⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Biodiversity_statistics

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General remarks

1. Welcomes the Action Plan for nature, people and the economy as a step in the right direction with regard to delivering the objectives of the Nature Directives;
2. Notes, however, with concern that the targets of the EU's 2020 Biodiversity Strategy and the CBD will not be met without immediate, substantial and additional efforts; underlines that the targets of the EU's 2010 Biodiversity Strategy were not met;
3. Observes that healthy and resilient ecosystems are better able to mitigate the effects of, and adapt to, climate change and hence limit global warming; notes that they are more resistant to extreme weather events and recover from them more easily, providing a wide range of benefits on which people depend;
4. Observes that in Europe, almost one-quarter of wildlife species are now threatened with extinction and most ecosystems have deteriorated to such an extent that they are no longer able to fulfil their valuable functions; notes that this is resulting in enormous social and economic losses for the EU, since the main causes of biodiversity loss, that is to say the deterioration of habitats, the over-exploitation of natural resources, the introduction and propagation of invasive alien species and climate change, are on the increase, cancelling out the positive effects of initiatives intended to prevent this;
5. Notes that the Action Plan aims to 'accelerate progress toward the EU 2020 goal of halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services'; considers it regrettable however that no other reference has been made to the 2020 Biodiversity Strategy or to the conclusions of its mid-term review;
6. Reiterates the need for additional, substantial and continuous efforts to be made in order to achieve the 2020 targets, and calls on the Commission and the Member States to give this greater political priority;
7. Stresses the need to ensure that Union nature legislation is fully and faithfully implemented;
8. Stresses that substantial progress in cutting greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution and other pollutants, and in improving energy and material efficiency, must be complemented by further actions by Member States to fully apply agreed policies to better protect biodiversity, natural resources, and public health;
9. Highlights the need to further integrate policies and knowledge in order to achieve the aim of living well, within the limits of our planet, which is the long-term vision of the 7th Environment Action Programme;
10. Regrets the Action Plan's limited time frame and calls on the Commission to commence work on the next biodiversity strategy without delay for the period post-2020;

Involvement of all actors

11. Welcomes the four priority areas identified in the Action Plan and emphasises the need for the active involvement of all relevant actors at national, regional and local level so that the concrete actions to be taken can effectively tackle the shortcomings in the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives;
12. Recalls that the European Court of Auditors stated in its Special Report No 1/2017 that coordination between the responsible authorities and other stakeholders in the Member States was not sufficiently developed;
13. Calls on the Commission to provide effective support to national and regional actors in implementing nature legislation and in improving environmental inspections, including through competence and capacity building and better allocation of resources;

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14. Welcomes the fact that the Commission intends to update and further develop guidance documents in all EU official languages in order to promote greater understanding of the legislation on the ground and to help public authorities apply it correctly, and calls on the Commission in this regard to involve and consult all stakeholders in this process;
15. Emphasises the role of civil society in ensuring better implementation of Union nature legislation, and the importance of the provisions of the Aarhus Convention in this regard;
16. Calls on the Commission to come forward with a new legislative proposal on minimum standards for access to judicial review, and a revision of the Aarhus Regulation implementing the Convention as regards Union action in order to take account of the recent recommendation from the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee;
17. Welcomes the fact that, without jeopardising the conservation objectives and requirements laid down in the Nature Directives, flexible approaches to implementation that take into account specific national circumstances help reduce and progressively eliminate unnecessary conflicts and problems which have arisen between nature protection and socioeconomic activities, and also address the practical challenges resulting from the application of the annexes to the directives;
18. Calls on the Commission to clarify the role of the Committee of the Regions with regard to raising awareness and promoting local involvement and exchanges of knowledge;

Protected species and habitats

19. Underlines that Member States must ensure that there is no deterioration of Natura 2000 areas and must implement conservation measures in order to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of protected species and habitats;
20. Calls for the Nature Directives to be fully implemented in order to ensure that conservation actions that are taken are in line with the latest technical and scientific progress;
21. Regrets the fact that the Action Plan does not set out a priority strategy and concrete actions with a view to improving: pollinator protection, particularly with regard to efforts to tackle health risks and parasitic species (especially Varroa), coordination of research work, harmonisation of analysis methods, and sharing of scientific data on pollinators at European level, as requested in an earlier European Parliament resolution;
22. Urges the Commission once again to come forward with an EU strategy to protect and conserve threatened pollinators that comprehensively addresses in a cross-cutting way the fundamental issue of the depressing mortality rates of pollinators in Europe, particularly bees, which provide inestimable environmental and economic services;
23. Proposes that measures against Varroa should be mandatory at EU level, that bee-keeper training in bee protection methods should be supported, and that local and regional authorities, as well as farmers and all other citizens, should be encouraged to promote the development of plant species, especially flowering plants, in rural and urban areas in order to increase the availability of melliferous plants;
24. Recalls that the illegal killing of birds and particularly of migratory species in the Mediterranean, as well as of birds of prey in some Member States, remains a cause for concern; stresses the need for a plan coordinated at European level, on the basis of scientific data, to manage migratory bird species passing through more than one Member State;
25. Calls for the Invasive Alien Species (IAS) Regulation to be fully and effectively implemented and for the EU budget for this to be adequately financed; stresses that the inclusion of a species on the List of Invasive Alien Species of Union concern must be based on a standardised and harmonised risk assessment; considers that the management of IAS is an urgent priority, especially in Natura 2000 sites; welcomes the online platform, European Alien Species Information Network (EASIN), which facilitates access to data on alien species;

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26. Stresses that protecting our shared natural environment in Europe is essential for both our economies and well-being, that the Natura 2000 network is estimated to have an economic value of EUR 200-300 billion annually and can generate income for local communities through tourism and recreation, and that healthy ecosystems provide essential services such as fresh water, carbon storage, pollinating insects, and protection against floods, avalanches and coastal erosion⁽¹⁾; points out therefore that investing in the Natura 2000 network makes sound economic sense;

27. Recalls that the Natura 2000 network marine sites are significantly less well established than the terrestrial sites; calls on the Member States concerned to address this and on the Commission to facilitate the necessary cooperation with third countries to improve environmental protection in marine areas;

28. Welcomes the action aimed at integrating ecosystem services into decision-making; regrets, however, the absence of a concrete No Net Loss of Biodiversity Initiative in the Action Plan;

Links with other policy areas

29. Stresses the urgent need to take action to deal with the main causes of biodiversity loss, namely habitat destruction and degradation arising primarily from excessive consumption of land, pollution, intensive farming, use of synthetic chemical pesticides, the spread of alien species and climate change, and also stresses the need to ensure coherence among the EU's various policies;

30. Highlights that the 'Fitness Check' stresses the need to improve coherence with the common agricultural policy (CAP), and underlines the worrying decline in species and habitats linked to agriculture; calls on the Commission to carry out an evaluation of the impact of the CAP on biodiversity;

31. Reiterates that one of the six key priorities for rural development in the EU is the restoration, preservation and enhancement of ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry, including in Natura 2000 areas; recalls the numerous efforts made by those involved in agriculture, particularly in connection with the implementation of the greening measures introduced when the CAP was revised in 2013;

32. Reaffirms its call on the Commission and on the Member States to ensure that the funds under the CAP are redirected from subsidising activities associated with biodiversity decline to financing environmentally sustainable agricultural practices and maintaining connected biodiversity;

33. Calls on the Commission and the Member States furthermore, in cooperation with land owners and users, to investigate the possibility of 'green and blue services' (landscape, nature and water management) in return for payment based on market rates;

34. Notes that species that are designated as requiring special protection in the Habitats Directive have in some regions of Europe attained good conservation status and could thus endanger other wild species and domestic animals, thereby disturbing the natural balance of the ecosystem; calls on the Commission to develop an assessment procedure to enable the protection status of species in particular regions to be amended as soon as the desired conservation status is reached;

35. Recalls that the coexistence of people and large carnivores, particularly wolves, can have negative impacts in certain regions on the sustainable development of ecosystems and inhabited rural areas, particularly with regard to traditional agriculture and sustainable tourism, and on other socio-economic activities; calls on the Commission and the Member States to take concrete measures to address these issues, so as not to endanger the sustainable development of rural areas, while recognising the available flexibility within the Habitats Directive;

36. Calls on the Commission to support measures such as training for farmers regarding the protection of livestock against large carnivores and sharing best practices on livestock protection across Member States;

37. Regrets that the CAP has not been developed to protect the disappearing traditional agricultural practice of pastoralism, which is an important historical tool for habitat management and nature conservation; calls for the Action Plan to support a development framework for pastoralism in the Natura 2000 network;

⁽¹⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/pdf/state_of_nature_en.pdf

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38. Calls on the Commission to consider especially adaptive harvest management as a best practice tool to sustainably manage those waterbird populations that are sufficiently abundant within the EU and to conserve those which are in decline;

39. Underlines that significant biodiversity losses occur in marine areas and believes that the common fisheries policy (CFP) should promote biodiversity and sustainable consumption and production patterns; calls for an evaluation of the impact of the CFP on biodiversity;

Funding

40. Welcomes the European Court of Auditors report on the Natura 2000 network and concurs with its assessment that EU funds have not been mobilised sufficiently to support the management of the network;

41. Underlines that the funding of the Natura 2000 areas is mainly the responsibility of the Member States and emphasises the fact that a lack of funding is likely to have contributed the most to the gaps in the implementation of the Nature Directives, as stated in the 'Fitness Check';

42. Underlines that the possibility of establishing new financial mechanisms for biodiversity conservation with a view to achieving the 2020 targets is unlikely given the time frame of the current multiannual financial framework (MFF); calls for maximum use to be made of existing means, including L'Instrument Financier pour l'Environnement (LIFE), the CAP and structural funds;

43. Welcomes the upcoming Commission proposal to increase the nature and biodiversity envelope by 10 % under the LIFE programme;

44. States that more preparatory work is needed in view of the next MFF in terms of both reviewing and forecasting, in order to ensure adequate financing for nature conservation, biodiversity, and sustainable agriculture in Natura 2000 sites; considers that a comprehensive review of past spending, highlighting lessons learnt in terms of the performance of past measures, would be key in this regard;

45. Calls for new financial mechanisms for biodiversity conservation to be included in the next MFF; calls on the Commission to ensure that future financial instruments for agriculture, rural and regional development contain dedicated envelopes for biodiversity and management of the Natura 2000 network, which are co-managed by national and regional environmental authorities;

46. Calls on the Commission to tailor funding schemes more effectively to the Natura 2000 objectives and to establish cross-cutting Natura 2000 performance indicators for all relevant EU funds; calls on the Commission to also establish a tracking mechanism for Natura 2000 spending in order to improve transparency, accountability and effectiveness, and to integrate these into the next MFF;

47. Reiterates that the Natura 2000 programme is customarily funded through co-financing; calls on the Member States to increase their Natura 2000 funding substantially, in order for co-financing to be set at more attractive rates and to improve uptake of the fund as a result, and for measures to be taken to reduce administrative burdens on applicants and project beneficiaries;

48. Highlights the potential of public-private financing to develop ecosystem services, green infrastructure and other natural capital related areas and welcomes the fact that the Natural Capital Financing Facility (NCFF) will continue to support biodiversity-related projects for the 2017-2019 implementation period;

49. Calls on the Commission to promote and propose means for the funding and the development of transboundary management plans for large carnivore species, and also calls for a detailed examination of the role of large carnivores and the possible introduction of adjustment measures to ensure that biodiversity, the agricultural landscape and the centuries-old practice of letting stock graze in mountain regions are maintained;

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Green infrastructure

50. Welcomes the commitment made in the Action Plan to provide guidance to support the development of green infrastructure for better connectivity of Natura 2000 areas, but reiterates its call for a genuine proposal for the development of a Trans-European Network for Green Infrastructure (TEN-G);

51. States that it is important for the competent authorities in the Member States, with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, to make better use of integrated spatial planning processes, to improve a horizontal understanding of TEN-G with sector-specific knowledge, and to enable the financing of increased connectivity, and green infrastructure in general, through rural development and regional development funds; notes that these criteria should guide the post-2020 MFF for planning infrastructure works; observes that the concept of green infrastructure also contributes to the establishment of a sustainable economy by maintaining the benefits of ecosystems while mitigating the adverse effects of transport and energy infrastructures;

52. Observes that it is necessary to study the role of green infrastructure in mitigating the effects of natural disasters linked to meteorological and climatic changes, in particular extreme meteorological and climatic conditions that are the cause of some of the most devastating and deadly natural disasters in Europe and the world;

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53. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission.
