

MEPs adopt the 'Gerbrandy' Report on biodiversity

Title

On April 20th the European Parliament made a stand in support of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development when it adopted the 'Motion for a European Parliament resolution on our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020', authored by Dutch Liberal MEP Mr Gerben Jan Gerbrandy. The report responds to the new EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020, published by the European Commission in May 2011.

Although this strategy is intended to enable the EU to meet its new 2020 biodiversity conservation target, it has been widely acknowledged, not least by the Commission itself, that the strategy represents the bare minimum level of ambition needed to meet this target. The European Parliament's report seeks to redress this lack of ambition, and proposes specific actions to help achieve the 2020 target, and fulfill the EU's international commitments under the Convention on Biodiversity. For example on the conservation and restoration of nature, the report states that in order to establish a clear pathway to achieving the EU's 2050 biodiversity vision, at least 40 % of all habitats and species must have a favourable conservation status by 2020, and by 2050, 100 % (or almost 100 %) of habitats and species must have a favourable conservation status.

The European Parliament's report also outlines the changes needed to those EU sectoral policies that are driving biodiversity loss, and specifically calls for greening of Pillar I and strengthening of Pillar II of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, stopping overfishing and restoring fish stock, and the elimination of discards and bycatch of non-target species under the Common Fisheries Policy.

The report also highlights the economic costs of biodiversity loss. For example, the benefits generated by the European Union's Natura 2000 network of protected areas alone are estimated to be worth EUR 200-300 billion, with a total of about 4.5 to 8 million full-time equivalent jobs being supported directly from visitor expenditure in and around these sites.

The report presents a masterplan for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, but its impact will depend to a significant extent on whether its proposals are taken up or not in the ongoing sectoral reform and EU budget negotiations, or whether short term economic gain and political expediency are again allowed to dominate the discussions.

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