

The need for strong EU legislation on Invasive Alien Species

Title

Representatives of the European Union, environmental NGO's, scientists and other stakeholders discussed the European Commission's proposal for an EU Regulation on Invasive Alien Species at a high-level event organized by MEP Pavel Poc, BirdLife Europe, IUCN Brussels and the European Parliament Intergroup on Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development, on 20 January. The event served as a platform for exchange on various aspects of the proposal before the vote in the Environment Committee on 30 January and the vote in plenary currently scheduled in mid-March.

Much of the discussion during the event was raised by the possibility of including derogations for species of economic relevance in the proposal, which could seriously undermine the strength of the legislation. Several speakers pointed out the fact that allowing some Member States to opt out through derogations would mean that invasive species would spread to other countries, defeating any action taken by those countries.

Dr Paul Walton, head of Habitats and Species at [RSPB Scotland](#) (BirdLife in Scotland) stressed that geographical barriers have historically prevented flora and fauna from mixing and are the fundamental defence system behind biological diversity as we see it today. However, we are now breaking down those barriers and causing great damage to the ecosystems which means that the matter of invasive alien species is an intrinsically international issue that requires a shared standard across all member states, without loopholes and opt outs.

The European Commission issued its proposal for an [EU Regulation on Invasive Alien Species in September 2013](#) after long internal deliberations, paving the way for better and more coordinated action to address this threat in Europe.

In a [Joint Call](#) coordinated by BirdLife, IUCN and Neobiota in November 2013, the scientific community called for a more [science-based approach](#) to tackle invasive alien species in Europe. Piero Genovesi, Chair IUCN SSC Invasive Species Specialist Group and Senior Scientist at ISPRA, spoke at the event and provided an overview of the scientific rationale for a policy on invasive species, and gave suggestions on how this could be included in the proposal. He encouraged policy makers to produce a policy that remains flexible and adapts to a changing subject.

In his keynote speech, Janez Potočnik, Commissioner for the Environment, European Commission, stated: "Overall, invasive species are the second most important threat to our biodiversity after habitat loss. This situation is set to get worse as invasive species spread and new ones continue to enter EU territory. If we don't tackle the issue now, the costs of dealing with this will rise significantly, and biodiversity will be irreparably damaged. That's why we have made combating invasive species one of the six targets of our [Biodiversity Strategy for 2020](#)."

A 50 species cap, deeply criticised as scientifically baseless and completely arbitrary, will likely be excluded from the proposal but the European Commission has also suggested limiting the list of species of EU concern to only those that are alien across the whole territory of the Union. Many participants in the event disagreed and emphasised the need for a comprehensive list that includes such species as the Pontic rhododendron, the Zebra mussel and the Iberian slug, which are native to some parts of the EU but invasive in other parts.

Overall, the main outcomes of the event were that there is general agreement that the 50 species cap needs to be removed, national actions will be encouraged as much as the ones at the EU level, and that public and scientific participation will be clearly taken into account. The European Parliament ENVI committee reporter MEP Pavel Poc, and the representatives of the Council Presidency, Mr Petros Varelidis and of the European Commission, Ms Pia Bucella, also showed a strong commitment to work towards a first reading agreement on this legislative proposal.

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