

The Nature Protection Commitments in the 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy



A Rocha, BirdLife Europe and Central Asia, Buglife-The Invertebrate Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation Europe, CEEweb for Biodiversity, European Natural Heritage Foundation (Euronatur), EUROPARC Federation, European Environmental Bureau (EEB), Eurosité, Friends of the Earth Europe, International Mire Conservation Group, Reptile and Amphibian Conservation Europe (RACE), Rewilding Europe, Societas Europaea Herpetologica (SEH), Society for Ecological Restoration (SER), The Nature Conservancy, Wetlands International-European Association and WWF European Policy Office

The above mentioned members of the European Habitats Forum (EHF) have agreed the following position on the nature protection commitments in the 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy.

Summary

Member States need to politically endorse the nature protection commitments in the 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy and commit to their implementation

- We very much welcome the protected area (PA) targets in the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy and call on Member States to endorse them politically, to commit to their implementation at the highest level, and to install the necessary governance.
- The Strategy commits to a more effective implementation of conservation in existing protected areas; to extend the PA network to a minimum of 30% of EU land and sea, including through increasing connectivity; and ensuring at least 10% of EU land and sea areas are “strictly protected”. We strongly support these goals.

Improving the management effectiveness and actual protection of all existing and new protected areas is an urgent priority

- We would like to underline that all PA's need to be effectively managed in order to reach the conservation objectives for which they are designated. There is a real urgency, and action at scale is needed to increase the management effectiveness and actual protection, in both terrestrial and marine networks of protected areas. This is essential to improve the conservation status of the habitats and species for which they have been designated. The preliminary results of the State of Nature in the EU report demonstrate there is still a long way to go to reach this goal. Species dependent on agroecosystems are in particularly poor conservation status and need much more effective protection and management action.
- Too many existing Natura 2000 sites still have no conservation measures adopted or are not covered by management plans. Often conservation measures and management plans do not exist or are not legally binding which makes them near meaningless. In many cases, even when binding conservation objectives and measures are adopted, they are not effective, not implemented or enforced, and often lack secure funding. All Member States need to make progress and close the gaps in these areas urgently as a key priority.

Legally protect a minimum of 30% of the EU's land area and 30% of the EU's sea area and integrate ecological corridors, as part of a true Trans-European Nature Network

- The overarching objective for the additional designations should be to create an ecologically coherent and representative network of protected areas that covers the full range of ecosystems and their characteristic biodiversity across EUs land and seas.
- The N2000 network is the backbone of this network of protected areas and remaining gaps towards the completion of the N2000 network need to be closed as a matter of priority. The additional designations should be done according to a harmonised methodology.
- For PAs to be able to count towards the 30% target, they need to comply with the IUCN definition of PA's, its accompanying principles and common objectives¹ and be effectively managed.

¹ Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories, IUCN (2008) <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/30018>

- OECMs (other effective area-based conservation measures) need to comply with the definition agreed in the CBD context, give primacy to nature, where there is a conflict, clearly contribute to effective and long-term protection and the establishment of a representative and ecologically coherent network of protected areas, and comply with the IUCN criteria² on OECMs, in order to be counted towards the protected area target.

Strictly protect at least a third of the EU's protected areas, including all remaining EU primary and old-growth forests

- The criteria to define strict protection need to be aligned with the IUCN 1 & 2 management categories and focus primarily on non-intervention management and the protection of large scale natural processes, and vulnerable biodiversity and carbon rich areas. Strict protection must exclude all extractive and habitat altering activities. Only activities strictly required for the conservation purposes in line with the ecological requirements of the site should be allowed.

Effort sharing between Member States

- The protected area targets need to be reached both at national and at biogeographical level as this would entail a fair sharing of efforts by all Member States and reflect the ecological realities across EU Biogeographical regions.

Effectively manage all protected areas, defining clear conservation objectives and measures, and monitoring them appropriately

All protected areas need to have legally binding management agreements or plans, with conservation objectives, based on sound science and the ecological needs of the area, timelines, monitoring and specific, funded management actions that are likely to be effective in restoring and sustaining the habitats and their characteristic species to good ecological status.

Member States have a responsibility to ensure implementation of Management Plans and to evaluate progress regularly, taking account of biodiversity monitoring results and adjusting plans to increase effectiveness in achieving the conservation objectives.

Member States will need to ensure enforcement is effective, by promoting policies that ensure their judicial system is aware of the importance of environmental crimes and mismanagement, with prosecutors and judges trained in environmental crime matters; a system of fines and penalties that are commensurate to the crimes' importance and deter from similar actions.

² Recognising and reporting other effective area-based conservation measures, IUCN (2019) <https://www.iucn.org/news/protected-areas/201911/iucn-publishes-new-guidance-recognising-reporting-and-supporting-other-effective-area-based-conservation-measures>

To improve management effectiveness, the following elements should be strengthened:

Management Planning: Management plans with conservation objectives, based on science, and adequate conservation measures to meet these objectives. Agreeing what is being done, where and by whom. Clear designation of managing authorities, governing processes, decision making, funding and adequate resources allocation. Implementation of the management plan and monitoring the implementation. Attention to contingency, resilience and change management would further increase the effectiveness of protected area management. A successful management plan is dependent on mature communications and stakeholder engagement, starting from the first phases.

Stakeholder engagement: Working across sectors and at all levels in equitable and participatory processes, with involvement of all interested parties, land users, inhabitants and communities aiming to increase ownership of the conservation goals. To achieve inclusive and constructive stakeholder engagement, building trust and maintaining ongoing positive relationships requires protected area teams with mature communication skills.

Monitoring of biodiversity outcomes in the field: Regular, systematic, standardised monitoring of habitat and species condition to check the effectiveness of the measures; ensure we are on the pathway to species population and habitat quality recovery; and to stimulate and direct corrective action in case of insufficient progress.

Funding: Proper financial and other incentives must be established (e.g. through the CAP, including outcome-based agri-environmental measures and eco-schemes) so land and sea users have a benefit for treating their land and sea in a way that delivers conservation outcomes.

Capacity building and Communication: Protected area staff need a growing range of technical skills, while managers need to provide professional leadership and direction and to secure and wisely use the resources needed. They also need to find ways to address threats, old and new, and to justify and champion protected areas politically, socially, and economically. A recognition of the need for and commitment to capacity building across protected areas in each member state, will support the management effectiveness and thereby the biodiversity outcomes that cannot come by designation alone. Communication competencies include, listening, verbal and non-verbal communications, conflict management and resolution, negotiation skills and awareness raising.

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The overarching objective for the additional designations should be to create an ecologically coherent and representative network of protected areas that covers the full range of ecosystems and their characteristic biodiversity across EUs land and seas.

The N2000 network is the backbone of this network of protected areas and remaining gaps towards the completion of the N2000 network need to be closed as a matter of priority.

The additional designations should be done according to a harmonised methodology, taking into account criteria such as, inter alia:

- The completion of the Natura 2000 network
- The need to improve the representativity, connectivity, coherence, and effectiveness of the protected area network: need to ensure ecological corridors/mosaics of habitat to enhance biodiversity outcomes, ecosystem functionality and resilience
- The presence of red-listed and other priority species and important habitat types of which the Member State (MS) has an important responsibility (because an important part of the population/habitat distribution is found in that particular MS), particularly globally threatened taxa that are not sufficiently covered by the Natura 2000 network
- The need to support the recovery of insects, especially pollinators
- The need to buffer sensitive habitats
- The need to reactivate large scale ecological functionality (eg food chains, natural river dynamics)
- Areas earmarked for nature restoration in line with upcoming EU legally binding targets

For protected areas to be able to count towards the 30% target, they need to comply with the IUCN definition of PA's, its accompanying principles and common objectives³ and be effectively managed.

IUCN PA Definition: *"A protected area is a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values. "*

Essential⁴ accompanying principles³ for the IUCN definition of PAs:

- *For IUCN, only those areas where the main objective is conserving nature can be considered protected areas; this can include many areas with other goals as well, at the same level, but in the case of conflict, nature conservation will be the priority;*
- *Protected areas must prevent, or eliminate where necessary, any exploitation or management practice that will be harmful to the objectives of designation;*
- *Protected areas should usually aim to maintain or, ideally, increase the degree of naturalness of the ecosystem being protected;*
- *The definition and categories of protected areas should not be used as an excuse for dispossessing people of their land*

Objectives common to all IUCN PA management categories³: *All protected areas should aim to:*

- *Conserve the composition, structure, function and evolutionary potential of biodiversity;*
- *Contribute to regional conservation strategies (as core reserves, buffer zones, corridors, stepping-stones for migratory species etc.);*
- *Maintain diversity of landscape or habitat and of associated species and ecosystems;*

³ Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories, IUCN (2008) <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/30018>

⁴ The other accompanying principles are related to the choice of IUCN management categories of PA's and are therefore not mentioned here

- *Be of sufficient size to ensure the integrity and long-term maintenance of the specified conservation targets or be capable of being increased to achieve this end;*
- *Maintain the values for which it was assigned in perpetuity;*
- *Be operating under the guidance of a management plan, and a monitoring and evaluation programme that supports adaptive management;*
- *Possess a clear and equitable governance system.*

The key criteria that all protected areas need to comply with in order to count towards the 30% target are the following:

- The area should be legally protected, with as main objective the conservation of nature
- Requirement to meet conservation objectives through effective management and demonstrate recovery through systematic biodiversity monitoring
- Existence of effective legal provisions to prevent development and activities that are not consistent with the ecological needs and integrity of the site and its characteristic habitats and species and appropriate mechanisms to ensure implementation
- Clearly contribute to the establishment of a representative and ecologically coherent and resilient network

As the IPBES global assessment report shows, OECMs (other effective area-based conservation measures) managed by Indigenous peoples and local communities also contribute to the conservation of biodiversity and can be counted towards the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) protected area target. In order to be counted towards the protected area target they need to comply with the definition agreed in the CBD context, give primacy to nature, where there is a conflict, clearly contribute to effective and long-term protection and the establishment of a representative and ecologically coherent network of protected areas and comply with the IUCN criteria⁵.

Definition of OECM⁵ (CBD Decision 14/8): *A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values. (CBD, 2018).*

Illustrative examples of OECMs that are meeting the criteria⁵

- Permanently set-aside areas of a managed forest, such as old-growth, primary, or other high-biodiversity value forests, which are protected from both forestry and non-forestry threats
- Privately conserved areas, managed with a specific conservation objective but not recognised as protected areas under national legislation
- Sites managed to provide ecological connectivity between protected areas.

⁵ Recognising and reporting other effective area-based conservation measures, IUCN (2019) <https://www.iucn.org/news/protected-areas/201911/iucn-publishes-new-guidance-recognising-reporting-and-supporting-other-effective-area-based-conservation-measures>

- Permanent or long-term fisheries closure areas designed to protect complete ecosystems for stock recruitment, to protect specialised ecosystems in their entirety, or protect species at risk through the in-situ conservation of biodiversity as a whole, and are demonstrated to be effective against fishery and non-fishery threats alike.
- Sacred natural sites with high biodiversity values that are conserved in the long-term for their associations with one or more faith groups

Illustrative examples of areas that are NOT meeting the criteria⁵

- Small, semi-natural areas within an intensively-managed landscape with limited biodiversity conservation value, such as municipal parks, formal/domestic gardens, arboreta, field margins, roadside verges, hedgerows, narrow shoreline or watercourse setbacks, firebreaks, recreational beaches, marinas and golf courses
- Forests that are managed commercially for timber supply and are intended for logging, even though they may have some conservation values and support some species of interest.
- Agricultural lands which are managed in a manner that limits the in-situ conservation of biodiversity. This may include, for example, pastures that are grazed too intensively to support native grassland ecosystems or species, or grasslands replanted with monocultures or non-native species for the purposes of livestock production.
- Temporary agricultural set asides, summer fallow and grant-maintained changes to agricultural practice that may benefit biodiversity.

Strictly protect at least a third of the EU's protected areas, including all remaining EU primary and old-growth forests

The criteria to define strict protection need to be aligned with the IUCN 1 & 2 management categories and focus primarily on non-intervention management and the protection of large scale natural processes, and vulnerable biodiversity and carbon rich areas. Strict protection must exclude all extractive and habitat altering activities like logging, fishing, hunting, ploughing, cultivation, construction and mining. Only activities strictly required for the conservation purposes in line with the ecological requirements of the site should be allowed.

Strict protection and non-intervention does not mean inaction: activities designed to achieve the conservation objectives of the site should be allowed and implemented, including equitable management actions linked to pressures' and threats' reduction, visitors and local residents, and those restoration measures to make the non-intervention possible. This includes measures to find solutions compatible with the ecological needs of the site while recognising the needs and rights of people who have customarily used the area in question.

Effort sharing between Member States

The 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy mentions that *“The targets relate to the EU as a whole and could be broken down according to the EU bio-geographical regions and sea basins or at a more local level. Every Member State will have to do its fair share of the effort based on objective ecological criteria, recognising that each country has a different quantity and quality of biodiversity”*.

We want to underline that the protected area targets need to be reached both at national and bio-geographical level, as this would entail a fair sharing of efforts by all Member States and reflect the ecological realities across EU Biogeographical regions.