

Supporting EU's biodiversity targets by bridging the science-policy divide



Tuesday 15th November 2022, 14:00 – 15:30 CET

Hybrid event organized at the European Parliament, Brussels – Room PHS 4B1 / online

Co-hosted by MEP César Luena

Rapporteur of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 & Nature Restoration file

& MEP Jutta Paulus

Shadow Rapporteur for the Nature Restoration file

Speakers:

- **MEP Jutta Paulus**
- **Helen Glaves**, President, EGU
- **Grégoire Dubois**, Project Leader, Knowledge Centre for Biodiversity, European Commission
- **Alberto Arroyo Schnell**, Head of Policy and Programme, European Regional Office, IUCN
- **An Dewaele**, Biodiversity Mainstreaming Specialist, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
- **Janica Borg**, Biodiversity Strategy coordinator, European Environment Agency (EEA)
- **Irene Benito**, Senior Manager for European Affairs, Planet
- **Felicia Akinyemi**, Marie-Curie Research Fellow, Land System and Sustainable Land Management Unit, Institute of Geography, University of Bern, and EGU Biodiversity Task Force Member
- **MEP María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos**
- **MEP Cesar Luena**

Welcome Remarks

MEP Jutta Paulus

“It is fundamental to put biodiversity protection at the centre of our political agenda”

MEP Ms. Paulus highlighted the importance of ensuring the sustainability of **natural carbon sinks** as forests, oceans, and soil to solve the climate crisis. As biodiversity loss, at both species and genetic diversity level, is the most dramatic threat to civilisation, MEP Ms. Paulus pointed out the need of putting biodiversity protection at the **centre of the political agenda**. In addition, she stated that the Nature Restoration Law is **key** for the success of the **EU Green Deal**, and she officially welcomes the EU Commission’s proposal to increase nature restoration targets and demands for **stricter** and **more efficient funding mechanisms** as well as a **functioning governance structure** surrounding it.

Panel discussion

Mr. Grégoire Dubois, Project Leader, Knowledge Centre for Biodiversity, European Commission

“Steer for change. It is important to have a clear idea on what we want to reach, and how we want to reach it”

Mr. Grégoire Dubois identified **three dimensions** necessary to guarantee the nexus between science and policy, i.e., **temporal, spatial,** and **structural** dimensions. Concerning the temporal dimension, Mr. Dubois affirmed that policy making must be viewed as a process through which a sense of continuity must be assured at all different stages by implementing continuous dialogue between EU bodies. The second dimension is the spatial one, which refers to the need of having multi-polar discussions where topics as land use, energy, and nature conservation intertwined. The third dimension, i.e., **structural**, is related to the way all the data is managed and is used to inform policy makers. Those dimensions – Mr. Dubois explained – can ensure **continuity** and **diversity** in the **multi-stakeholder dialogue** pledging that **bidirectional** communication is permitted: policy makers effectively and properly using the data provided by the scientific community while also formulating actual policy questions to guide research.

Mr. Alberto Arroyo Schnell, Head of Policy and Programme, European Regional Office, IUCN

“The EU Nature Restoration Law is an historical opportunity for the EU and for the environment”

Mr. Arroyo Schnell believes that the EU Nature Restoration Law is an **historical opportunity** for the EU and for the environment. Moreover, he stated that **collaboration** between scientists and policy-makers is key to assure its legal implementation by the various stakeholders. Mr. Arroyo Schnell further added that nature conservation and restoration are necessary requirements for human species survival, and as such giving space to research is fundamental to allow **scientists** to get familiar with the **policy processes**. Since the latter should be more science-oriented – Mr. Arroyo Schnell concluded – **opportunities** for **input** and **participation** must be provided to the scientific community.

Mrs. An Dewaele, Biodiversity Mainstreaming Specialist, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

“No food without biodiversity”

Mrs. Dewaele commenced her contribution to this event by providing some figures: one third of the world’s soils are already moderately to highly **degraded**, as well as one third of the global fish stock is **over-exploited**. She used such data to solicitate urgent action, showing also how loss of **biodiversity** directly affects farmers’ yields and food security while threatening the livelihoods of more than 2 billion people directly dependent on agriculture worldwide. The **UN decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030)**, co-lead by FAO and UNEP, aims at preventing and halting degradation and restoring ecosystems on all continents and oceans – she continued. In addition, she highlighted the need for clear and precise targets for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity at global level, referring to the upcoming 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Since such a step requires political will, courage, and leadership, Mrs. Dewaele encouraged the EU to take the **leadership** on this and, with the assistance of FAO for the biodiversity targets related to agrifood systems, mobilise the international community to act and **reverse biodiversity loss worldwide**.

Mrs. Janica Borg, Expert, Biodiversity Strategy, European Environment Agency (EEA)

“Restore biodiversity to benefit everyone, especially people whose livelihoods depend on it”

Ms. Janica Borg affirmed that **national nature restoration plans** must be viewed as an encompassing strategy requiring the collaboration of various stakeholders aiming at assuring future life on this planet. She also stated that **data are vital** for defining such strategy and, therefore, the EEA will continue supplementing those to assist Member States in laying out their plans and assess as well as monitor their progress towards the target. The EEA will furthermore support the Member States by producing the technical solutions needed to submit the national restoration plans, and guiding the Member States through this process. The Eionet network spanning all of Europe, beyond the EU Member States, will be put to good use in bringing existing expertise together.

Mrs. Irene Benito, Senior Manager for European Affairs, Planet

“You cannot manage what you do not measure”

Ms. Irene Benito stated that **data** is necessary to bring about change. Indeed, she illustrated how Planet is actively contributing to this regard through the daily work of more than 200 **earth observation satellites** providing earth surface’s imagery detecting visible and invisible changes happening all over the globe. By enshrining the role of Planet’s satellites in water and forests management examples, Ms. Benito concluded by affirming that technology is already supplying us with advanced tools which we should use to reach 2030 goals.

Mrs. Felicia Akinyemi, Marie-Curie Research Fellow, Land System and Sustainable Land Management Unit, Institute of Geography, University of Bern, Switzerland

“Promote the use of science-based evidence to shape the European Union biodiversity policy”

Ms. Felicia Akinyemi emphasised the importance of having **scientific information** supporting the EU biodiversity targets’ indicators. In this regard, she highlighted the major role played by EGU biodiversity task force in providing Member States with access to data and expertise. On the other hand, Ms. Akinyemi pointed to the need of creating **synergies** between different ecosystems restoration plans as well as maintaining the habitats’ conservation status. Finally, she stated that science-based indicators with **long-term monitoring perspective** must be guaranteed to prove both the benefits that monitoring, restoring, and maintaining

different ecosystems bring as well as the **consequences of different policy actions**. She hoped that the EGU Biodiversity Task Force could support policymakers in these efforts by acting as an Honest Broker and providing timely and contextualised scientific information.

MEPs' Reactions

MEP María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos

“Restoring the European Union biodiversity areas is a crucial investment to make for our future and security, climate resilience, health, and wellbeing.”

MEP Mrs. María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos believes that the EU Commission’s proposal for nature restoration law constitutes a good basis, but there is still **room for improvement**. She further explained that the legally binding targets to restore degradation systems and the national restoration plans will be implemented up to 2050, and that **monitoring of these targets** is key for the success of this proposal. MEP Mrs. Rodríguez Ramos further explained that Member States must review their plans every 10 years, but midterm review of those can be discussed. In addition, she supported several the recommendations provided in the [EGU Biodiversity Task Force’s response](#) to the proposed Nature Restoration Law including greater **cooperation with local communities** when laying out the national plans, as they have great knowledge and expertise in complex ecosystems and including soil biodiversity as an additional target within the Nature Restoration Law. Finally, MEP Mrs. Rodríguez Ramos pushed forward the idea] improving the **funding scheme** of the proposal.

MEP Cesar Luena

“There is no way out of the climate biodiversity crisis without science.”

MEP Mr. Cesar Luena expressed his concerns regarding the climate crisis and related biodiversity loss and mentioned the several strategies the EU is implementing to tackle this crisis, such as the climate law and the nature restoration law. MEP Mr. Luena affirmed that – apart from restoring our ecosystems and preventing the consequences of climate change – the nature restoration law is an **ambitious step** forward which will boost the EU **leadership** in this regard. Finally, he believes that having the EU in a leading position in the fight against climate change ultimately requires **international and national commitment**, and he views scientists’ proposals and recommendations as the guidelines which must be followed for the implementation of effective policies.

Q&A Session

During the Q&A session, one of the attendee openly shared the sense of **urgency** surrounding nature restoration issues and the need to take immediate action. In this regard, it was asked to the panellist “*What is your take on this? What can we do? What are the next steps?*”. **Mrs. Irene Benito** first answered this question by clearly stating that **more research on possibilities in earth observation science** is needed. On a different note, **Mr. Grégoire Dubois** stated that it is necessary to **converge evidence** as well as **integrate the issues** to solve, not only climate and biosphere problems, but even equity, sustainable nature, and social problems. For this, communication, and **multi-stakeholders’ interactions** are needed. **Mrs. An Dewaele** answered to the same question stating that there must be **more opportunities** for matching and **connecting research to responding policy questions**, and the outcome should be made available and understandable for policy makers to take action. Furthermore, **Mrs. Janica Borg** posed the attention to the **output of scientific research** stressing that the way it is presented is key for the interpretation of policy questions. To conclude, **Mr. Alberto Arroyo Schnell** highlighted how the **scientific community** has an immense responsibility in bringing about change and development. In this regard, he added that researchers’ responsibility does not end when scientific information is produced, but rather continues when this is **shared, divulged, and communicated** to the public.

Closing remarks

Mrs. Helen Glaves, President, EGU

Mrs. Helen Glaves concluded this event by **soliciting collective action** for both environment restoration as well as the halt of the ongoing degradation. In this regard, she views **communication** as a key factor to maintain development and not to allow further environmental erosion. The type of communication she thinks must be pushed forward is not only a bilateral one, but one that also comprehends **interactions across sectors** and with **society**. Everybody should have clear why acting now is important and why **everyone’s participation is needed**. Finally, Mrs. Glaves concluded by underlining the importance of **data democratisation** for trustworthy and sound research for policy makers, and indeed she believes there is no way out of climate and biodiversity crisis without science.