Building the Leadership for Nature-Based Solutions for Coastal and Marine Ecosystems

Tuesday 6 June 2023, 16:15 – 18:00 CEST

Hybrid Event (Brussels, Belgium & Online)

Hosted by MEP Catherine Chabaud

Moderated by Mercedes Muñoz Cañas, Marine Biodiversity and Blue Economy Programme Manager, IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation

Speakers:

- **MEP Ms. Catherine Chabaud**
- **Ms. Yaprak Arda**, Marine Programme Officer, IUCN
- **Mr. Diarmaid Ó Cuanacháin**, Junior Policy Officer, IUCN
- **Mr. Humberto Delgado Rose**, Director of Dir. D on 'Biodiversity', DG ENV, European Commission
- **Ms. Maria Soledad Vivas Navarro**, Project Coordinator of LIFE – Blue Natura, Junta de Andalucia

Welcome Remarks

MEP Ms. Catherine Chabaud

> ***"Developing nature-based solutions involves protecting and regenerating marine and coastal ecosystems, which is the main goal of the nature restoration law."***

To begin the event, **MEP Ms. Catherine Chabaud** explained that nature-based solutions take advantage of nature and the power of healthy ecosystems to **protect people, optimize infrastructures and preserve a stable and sustainable future**. If delivered appropriately, nature-based solutions can significantly contribute to addressing multiple societal challenges, provide a sustainable future and can contribute to address the political and social challenges. Coastal systems have an important potential to contribute to climate regulation against the effects of global warming and natural disasters. She used the example of **mangroves as blue carbon ecosystems** in which we should invest to protect the ecosystem services they provide. When degraded or destroyed theses ecosystems emit the carbon they have stored for centuries into the atmosphere or ocean and **become sources of greenhouse gases**. Developing nature-based solutions involves protecting and regenerating marine and coastal ecosystems, which is the main goal of **the Nature Restoration Law** currently under discussions at the European Parliament, which she fully supports.

Presentation: Building the Leadership for Nature-Based Solutions for Coastal and Marine Blue Carbon Ecosystems

Yaprak Arda, Marine Programme Officer, IUCN

> ***"A sustainable blue economy is important for a just transition but it requires adequate finance."***

Ms. Arda gave fundamental information about nature-based solutions, blue carbon and some of the efforts IUCN is implementing especially in the Mediterranean region. She explained that blue carbon is the **carbon stored in coastal and marine ecosystems** that represent significant carbon sinks. **Over 200 million people live and depend on coastal ecosystems**. In the marine

environment, the degradation and loss of coastal habitats particularly ecosystems capturing carbon is resulting in an unprecedented loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. In addition to that, the **stored carbon is also released again**. Ms. Arda said that there is a need for a **range of incentives and mechanisms** to be used to ensure both, reduction of impacts with more sustainable practices and achievement of conservation goals for these ecosystems, such as carbon credits. She emphasizes that blue carbon ecosystems come with a wide range of ecosystem services from fisheries to tourism, however there is a significant disconnect between the value of ecosystem services and the premium on top of a carbon project price that these projects are able to source. She accentuates that blue finance success relies on **public-private partnerships and blended finance solutions** to de-risk investments, with robust metrics and monitoring and an enabling regulatory framework. Nature-based solutions including blue carbon and blue natural capital can help to engage private sector partners, local communities and civil society and offers opportunities to address risks and support resilience. There are a lot of opportunities that can align policy processes to enhance ambition, accelerate implementation and measure collective results for the restoration and conservation of coastal ecosystems.

Diarmaid Ó Cuanacháin, Junior Policy Officer, IUCN

> ***"A Nature Restoration Law can make a big contribution to current climate commitments, tackle climate change and recover biodiversity"***

Mr. Cuanacháin provided a brief outline of the EU policy context surrounding these projects and the synergies of the work between IUCN and the ongoing parliament initiatives on the EU level. He focused on the **EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030** and the **European Climate Law**. Some of the goals for the EU Biodiversity Strategy are the enlargement of protected areas and further **legally protecting 30% of the EU's sea area** and integrating ecological corridors. 10% of EU seas should be strictly protected. Furthermore **25% of EU budget dedicated to climate action** is to be invested on biodiversity and nature-based solutions. He explained that a core feature of this would be the Nature Restoration Law. The proposal is currently under negotiations in the European Parliament. Not only would it implement the EUs commitments under target 2 of the Kunming Montreal GBF, it would also make a big contribution to

concurrent climate commitments made in 2015. Mr. Cuanacháin mentioned that habitats that are highly valuable for carbon sequestration and other ecosystem services such as *Posidonia oceanica* are identified as habitats for restoration under this proposal. The protection and restoration of these coastal ecosystems offer effective solutions for adaptation and climate change mitigation efforts that need to be brought into practice to avoid further degradation of these valuable ecosystems across the region.

Panel Discussion

Humberto Delgado Rosa, Director of Dir. D on 'Biodiversity', DG ENV, European Commission

> ***"The nature restoration law is not about nature to begin with, it is about people and protecting the ecosystem services and putting them back to serve us all better"***

Mr. Delgado Rosa was impressed by a figure that showed that coastal **blue carbon systems are valued around 119bn$US per year** and another 65bn$ adding the used costs associated with natural disasters like floodings. He accentuated, that economically they are very significant and therefore protecting and restoring them is even more essential. He mentioned multiple initiatives that did just that, but also said that **implementation is still often lacking.** However, we do have a very **ambitious Biodiversity Strategy 2030** that has pushed for **reaching 30% of protected areas on land and sea**. The global nature of these targets was reconfirmed at COP15 in Montreal, so we now have **quantified global targets** that are politically binding for marine restoration, as well as land restoration. He elaborated on what is in the pipeline: the **Nature Restoration Law**, but also the **action plan for fisheries and marine ecosystem**. Mr. Delgado Rosa finished his intervention mentioning that the Nature Restoration Law is not about nature to begin with, it is about people and protecting the ecosystem services and putting them back to serve us all better.

Maria Soledad Vivas Navarro, Project Coordinator of LIFE - Blue Natura, Junta de Andalucia

> ***"There now are solid procedures with government support, science-based methodologies for calculating absorption as well as a reliable framework choices."***

Ms. Vivas Navarro presented the Life Blue Natura Project, which is an innovative European project that aims to find the mechanisms, tools and the knowledge to address all these challenges in order to improve marine ecosystem management and restoration projects **using carbon financing mechanisms**. It started in 2018 and finished last year. Two of the main objectives she mentioned were the **quantification of actual carbon deposits** and carbon sequestration rates in seagrass meadows and tidal marshes in Andalusia and the **conservation of this CO2** capture and storage service through policies related to fight against climate change, particularly those concerning **voluntaries carbon markets**. . The study area was the coast of Andalusia in the south of Spain.. In 2018, the government of Andalusia has approved a **voluntary Andalusian GHG emissions offsetting system**, with a catalogue of offsetting projects. The Life Blue natura project has prepared the "Andalusian Standar of Certification for Seagrass Medow and Tidal Marsh projects" and a tool to calculated the CO2 absorption generated by the blue carbon projects and as a result of the project the Andalusian government has included **2 Blue Carbon projects** in the Catalogue of Offset Projects.

The participation in the offsetting system is voluntary and implies acceptance of the technical, administrative and methodological provisions defined in the Standard. In collaboration with IUCN they created a **manual for the creation of blue carbon projects in Europe and the Mediterranean**, which can be of great help for other projects as well. After ending the project there now are a **reliable framework to support the Andalusian offsetting system including for first time Blue Carbon projects.** Many organizations have already requested to offset emissions, which speaks for the success of Life Blue Natura.

Imen Zribi, Faculty of Sciences of Tunis and Tunisian Association of Taxonomy,

> ***"Ecosystems like posidonia oceanica are in fact efficient carbon sinks, but can also turn into carbon sources. Because of this it is highly important to do scientific monitoring about the health and condition of the seagrass meadow."***

Ms. Zribi presented on the **estimation of carbon stock and assessment of natural carbon sinks in seagrass meadows and coastal wetlands** using the case study of the **Kerkennah Archipelago** in the south of Tunisia. To start the project, they used the manual for the creation of Blue Carbon Projects in Europe and the Mediterranean, mentioned before by Ms. Vivas. The results of the seagrass carbon stock project showed that the amount of carbon found

beneath the seagrass meadow is significantly higher than those found in the bare sediment which confirms the role played by the **seagrass meadow as an efficient carbon sink**. Using the available data, they found that in the Kerkennah archipelago there is around 3 billion kg of carbon. It has to be kept in mind that this result is only for 30% of the surface area of the future marine protected area of Kerkennah. They found that Tunisia emitted around 31.785Mton of CO2 in 2021. In that year the seagrass meadow of the future marine protected area absorbed around 0.39% of this annual emission. The percentage of total national CO2 emission emitted in 2021 captured by *Posidonia oceanica* along the Tunisian coast makes up between 26 and 55%. Approximately 60% of the Posidonia habitat is located within the Tunisian coast, making it a critical area for conservation efforts. Ms. Zribi also mentioned that these ecosystems like *Posidonia oceanica* and mangroves are in fact efficient carbon sinks, but **can also turn into carbon sources**. Because of this it is highly important to do **scientific monitoring about the health and condition of the seagrass meadow**. This will allow us to effectively manage this meadow.

Q&A

Ms. Chaubaud asked the European Commission how to push Member States to put blue carbon into their NDCs to which **Mr. Delgado Rosa** commented that the difficulty in setting up a functioning system of carbon farming lies in the **accounting and quantification**, as well as the reassurance, that the carbon stored will stay there and will be stored for a long period of time.

A question from the audience was regarding the role of the **private sector**. **Ms. Vivas Navarro** answered this question by emphasizing that they had many companies from the private sector approaching them, as they wanted to offset their emissions and for them it was important to do it with **regional projects**. For them it is important to **give the benefits to the local community**.

Another question was concerned with finding **synergies between food supply, renewable energy and nature-based solutions.**

Mr. Delgado Rosa answered this question by saying that it is **not possible to focus on just one of these goals**, as they are all interconnected. He uses the example of off-shore wind parks

and how they can be designed to be artificial reefs. **Ms. Chaubaud** also mentioned that she tried to promote this kind of maritime infrastructure with positive impact. She mentioned a pilot project of hers that tries to find synergies between offshore wind energy, fishing, agriculture etc.

To a question asking about the **value of long living organisms like whales or elephants in carbon sequestration, Mr. Delgado Rosa** answered that big animals obviously have a very relevant ecological role. He said that it has to be considered, that 96% of terrestrial vertebrates nowadays are humans and their livestock and pets, and only 4% are wild animals, which is a problem and not only a carbon problem. The ecological role of wildlife has to be emphasized and he agreed that this is a good topic to keep insisting on.

Ms. Zribi was asked to further elaborate on the collaboration with fisheries. She emphasized that when they are conserving seagrass meadows, they are not only conserving the carbon underneath it but also a range of ecosystem services. She talked about another project she was working on that **encouraged fishermen to use and to conserve these traditional and sustainable techniques**.

Closing remarks

In a few words, **Ms. Chabaud** thanked the speakers on their timely and interesting discussions around the event's topic of nature-based solutions in marine and coastal ecosystems. She concluded by emphasizing the **importance of science** to have common solutions for mapping and calculating the **huge contributions of blue carbon to climate issues**. She also mentioned her support for the **IPOS** (International Panel for Ocean Sustainability) and the call for the **ocean to be recognized as a global common**.