

Updated Belgian National Biodiversity Strategy for 2030



Colophon

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Updated Belgian National Biodiversity Strategy for 2030

Context and development process

National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans are the main tools to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, Rio 1992) at the national level, including supporting the integration of biodiversity into the planning and activities of all sectors that may have an impact (positive and negative) on biodiversity.

Belgium's National Biodiversity Strategy (NBS) 2006-2016 was approved on 26 October 2006 by the Interministerial Conference for the Environment, composed of the competent ministers of the Federal Government, the three Regions (Flemish Region, Brussels-Capital Region and Walloon Region) and the three Communities (Flemish-, French- and German-speaking). It is a unique national document on biodiversity policy that encompasses the responsibilities of the different governments in Belgium and enables Belgium to meet its European and international commitments. It provides a framework for the policy to be followed and the subsequent actions to be developed for implementation.

The Biodiversity Convention Steering Group, together with the Nature Steering Group, initiated the first update process of the NBS in 2011 and the second in 2023. These steering groups bring together the competent authorities at regional and federal levels, as well as scientific institutions. They were established under the auspices of the Belgian Commission for the Coordination of International Environmental Policy under the auspices of the Interministerial Conference on the Environment.

In March 2012, the Interministerial Conference on the Environment decided to update the Belgian National

Biodiversity Strategy before the end date and align it with the Aichi 2020 Targets. This led to the adoption in 2013 of the strategy "Biodiversity 2020, update of the Belgian National Strategy". This update allowed the content of the strategy to be adapted to take into account the new commitments made under European and international biodiversity agreements, while also taking into account the conclusions of the mid-term review of the implementation of the NBS until 31/12/2011. In March 2023, the Interministerial Conference on the Environment decided to proceed with the current, second update of the NBS. This update was initiated to align the national targets with the targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (K-M GBF) 2030. The content of the strategy has also been aligned with biodiversity-related commitments made in European and international agreements.

Both updates of the NBS were subject to public consultation. For this update, its preliminary draft was subject to public consultation from 24/06/2024 to 24/09/2024.

Achieving the objectives of the NBS represents a major challenge. The active participation not only of the environmental community but also of all stakeholders (regional, federal and local governments, communities, provinces and municipalities, biodiversity conservation stakeholders, business, scientific institutions, non-governmental organisations and society as a whole) will be crucial in the coming decade for the future of life on Earth and for ensuring our well-being.

The updated NBS has yet to be integrated into the planning and activities of all sectors whose activities depend on or may have an impact (positive and negative) on biodiversity; it will be taken into account in the revision of federal and regional action plans.



The Updated Belgian National Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, was approved by the Extended Interministerial Conference for the Environment on 30 January 2025 by:

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Foreword



Under “Biological diversity”^{*} we understand the variety of living organisms from all sources, including, *inter alia*, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species^{*}, between species and of ecosystems (Article 2 of the CBD). Biological diversity or *biodiversity* supports ecosystem functioning and the provision of ecosystem services essential for human activities and well-being. It provides food security, health and clean air and water. It contributes to local livelihoods and economic development and is essential for achieving sustainable development goals, including poverty reduction.

Since the 1970s, interest in global problems relating to natural resources and the environment, such as climate change and biodiversity decline, has led to a number of international agreements aimed at the conservation of natural resources, their ability to renew themselves and the quality of the environment. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, Rio, 1992) has three global objectives: the conservation of biological diversity (biodiversity), the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.

Article 6 of the Convention requires each Contracting Party to develop national strategies, plans or programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Furthermore, countries should integrate conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, to the extent possible, into relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies. This strategy describes how Belgium implements this article.

Belgium took an important step on biodiversity conservation at the European Gothenburg Summit in 2001. Together with other European countries, Belgium pledged to “halt the loss of biodiversity in

the EU by 2010”¹. At the global level, the 2010 target was adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002.

The 2010 biodiversity targets inspired numerous actions at various levels worldwide as well as in Belgium. Yet the scale of these actions was not sufficient to remove the pressure on biodiversity. Furthermore, biodiversity issues were not sufficiently integrated into broader policies, strategies, programmes and actions, so that the underlying causes of biodiversity loss were not significantly reduced. Although today it can no longer be denied that biodiversity, ecosystem services and human well-being are intertwined, the value of biodiversity is still not adequately addressed in broader policies and incentive structures (CBD Decision X/2).

In October 2010, world leaders in Nagoya, Japan, recognised that the target to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010 was not being met and reached a historic global agreement to take urgent action to build a future where humans live in harmony with nature.

The CBD Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, with its vision, mission, 5 strategic objectives and 20 ambitious but realistic targets (“the Aichi Biodiversity Targets”), was adopted by Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) with the aim of halting and ultimately reversing the loss of biodiversity on our planet by 2020. All Parties committed to review their national instruments to incorporate the strategic plan and the Aichi targets by 2014. A separate strategic plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety was adopted in 2010.

¹ Presidency conclusions, Gothenburg Council, 15 and 16 June 2001. SN/200/1/01 REV1, p. 8. http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/impact/background/docs/goteborg_concl_en.pdf

In May 2011, the European Commission adopted an ambitious new strategy to halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the EU by 2020. This strategy included six main targets and 20 actions to help Europe reach its target. The update of Belgium's first National Biodiversity Strategy (NBS) was an opportunity to translate the ambitious global agreements reached at the 10th Conference of the Parties to the CBD in Nagoya and the EU's 2020 biodiversity strategy.

Unfortunately, by 2020, it had become clear that the Aichi targets had failed to halt biodiversity decline. On a global scale, the CBD estimated that 6 out of 20 Aichi targets had been partially achieved. There are several reasons for this failure. The most cited is the lack of clearly defined measures to assess progress, making the Aichi targets difficult to implement. Insufficient funding, lack of cooperation and insufficient integration of biodiversity considerations into development planning and sectoral policies also contributed significantly to this failure.

In 2020, the European Commission adopted a European Biodiversity Strategy 2030, consolidating the objectives of the previous strategy. This version goes further, proposing ambitious actions and commitments to protect and restore biodiversity in Europe and around the world. It identifies 4 priorities to return biodiversity to its central role and demonstrates the economic benefits of a protected or restored ecosystem* while exposing the potential risks of inaction.

In December 2022, world leaders reached a historic global agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (K-M GBF), in Montreal, Canada at the 15e Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 15). This framework agreement sets out an ambitious path to achieve the global vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050. This global biodiversity framework defines a mission for 2030, a vision for 2050 including 4 long-term targets for 2050, and 23 targets, mainly for 2030. The COP15 agreements include a framework for monitoring implementation of the K-M GBF, a strengthened mechanism for planning, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of implementation, a strategy for mobilising the financial resources needed for implementation, strategic arrangements for capacity development and technical and scientific

cooperation, and an agreement on digital information on genetic resources.

The K-M GBF builds on the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, its achievements, gaps and lessons learned, as well as the experience and results of other relevant multilateral environmental agreements. It sets out an ambitious plan for large-scale actions to transform our societies' relationship with biodiversity by 2030 in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, and to ensure that by 2050 the shared vision of living in harmony with nature becomes a reality.

Following the adoption of these new global and European instruments, it has become essential to review and update Belgium's national biodiversity strategy, and to align our targets with the 2030 and 2050 targets.

The updated Strategy in brief

Biodiversity has many dimensions, the importance of which we still do not sufficiently appreciate. Biodiversity, among other services, provides us with means to earn a living. Biodiversity underpins our food supply and many medicines and other products essential for our existence. Biodiversity contributes to human well-being by providing ecological services that, for example, are fundamental to nutrient cycling, soil fertility, pollination of many fruit trees, freshwater and air quality, and opportunities to mitigate the effects of climate change. It also offers a wide range of opportunities for recreation and is an inexhaustible source of knowledge, education, inspiration and cultural identity. Biodiversity conservation is therefore a common interest for all mankind.

In Belgium, living environment, including nature conservation, is mainly a regional competence. The federal level has competence for marine environment under Belgian jurisdiction, military domains and railway domain. It has specific environmental powers (CITES, trade in alien species, product standards) and other powers around environment and biodiversity (development cooperation, finance, economy, etc.).

It has the means to take action (public procurement, taxation, etc.).

The National Biodiversity Strategy (NBS) is Belgium's response to the CBD's formal commitment to submit a revised or updated National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans, including national targets, by the 16th Conference of the Parties (COP-16, October 2024). It provides a framework for policy development and future action development. It incorporates existing regional and federal frameworks and action plans and supports their integration and adaptation. It aims to provide strategic policy guidance so that biodiversity stakeholders in Belgium can work together in partnership to contribute at national and international levels to achieving the target of halting biodiversity loss by 2030. This will be achieved by ensuring a more effective and coherent implementation of the three targets of the CBD. The strategy pays particular attention to creating greater coherence and filling gaps in existing Belgian instruments, and to optimising biodiversity integration at national and international levels.

The NBS comprises a set of 16 strategic objectives and 82 operational objectives. The objectives formulated in the strategy provide a common basis and serve as a guide for implementation by the relevant authorities. Following the recommendations to update the NBS, the structure of the targets was

revised to better align and reflect the K-M GBF and the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 (see Annex 4).

The text of the NBS clearly identifies, for each objective, the link with the articles of the CBD, the relevant objectives of the K-M GBF, thematic work programmes, directives, etc. adopted under the Convention, as well as relevant EU commitments. The main focus is on the sectoral integration of biodiversity. Where necessary, federal and regional governments and other relevant actors will take implementation measures in a coordinated manner.

The updated strategy has been prepared for a 6-year period (2025-2030). Monitoring of progress and obstacles to implementation of the NBS will be included in national reports to the CBD. Information on the implementation of the NBS is also published on the website of the Belgian Clearing House Mechanism for the CBD (www.biodiv.be).

Many different actors need to play an active role in implementing the strategy: ministries and governments, advisory bodies, research institutes, NGOs, information centres, individuals and communities, etc. A variety of activities will have to be carried out simultaneously in different sectors and - after further consultation and coordination - at different administrative levels.

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A close-up photograph of a blue tit bird perched on a red brick wall. The bird has a blue head, a white throat, and a yellow breast. It is holding a small, yellow, segmented caterpillar in its beak. The background consists of red bricks with white mortar lines.

Part I: Introduction

I.1 Definition of biodiversity and ecosystem services*

Biodiversity² or biological diversity means the diversity of all living organisms of all systems, including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species*, between species and of ecosystems* (Article 2 of the CBD).

Humans are an essential part of biodiversity. Biodiversity is present throughout the biosphere, from 10,000 metres deep in the ocean to the stratosphere. Biodiversity is constantly changing. It is the result of evolutionary processes that have been going on for 3.8 billion years. Biodiversity is threatened by processes such as habitat destruction and fragmentation, pollution, overexploitation, the spread of invasive alien species and climatic changes leading to population decline and species extinction.

The rate at which species are currently becoming extinct is higher than the average extinction rate observed over the past 10 million years, ranging from tens to hundreds of times higher. Unless action is taken to reduce the intensity of these threats, the global rate of species extinction will accelerate further (Global Assessment, IPBES 2019).

For the purposes of this Strategy, we use the following components of biodiversity (Encyclopedia of Biodiversity, 2013):

- **Ecosystem diversity*** - refers to the variety of ecosystems found in a given area, region or on the planet as a whole. This includes the variety of habitats, communities and ecological processes found in these ecosystems. Ecosystems range from estuaries, rivers, ponds, wetlands and temperate forests to tropical forests, coral reefs, mountains, deserts and other areas, including agricultural zones, urban parks and gardens. Interactions occur through carbon cycles and others, e.g. pollination of flowers, predators, etc.

- **Species diversity*** is the variety of species present in a given region, habitat or ecosystem. It includes the number of species present (species richness) and the distribution of individuals among these species (evenness). From tiny organisms such as bacteria to much larger life forms such as trees and whales, the estimated number of species living on Earth ranges from 5 to 100 million. Currently, about 1.9 million species have been named and described. Every year, about 20,000 new species are described worldwide.
- **Genetic diversity** refers to the variation of information in genes* within a species or population. It is the variety of genetic information in all plants, animals, fungi and micro-organisms on Earth. Genetic diversity exists within and between populations and between species. Genetic variation is primarily important for the survival of populations and ultimately species, as it allows populations to adapt to environmental changes and survive exposure to new diseases and parasites.

Ecosystem services or nature's contribution to people (Nature's Contribution to People, NCP, also Natural Capital) encompasses all the ways in which living nature contributes to people's quality of life, including both positive and negative contributions (IPBES 2019 Global Assessment). Positive contributions include, for example, food supply, air and water purification, climate regulation, carbon storage, pollination, human well-being (physical and mental health), while negative contributions include, for example, disease transmission. Moreover, nature's contributions to humanity may evolve over time: what was once a benefit may become a detriment. In general, the values of nature's contributions are predominantly positive, and humans are not always aware of the benefits they receive from nature, nor of their value (see Part I.2).

Biodiversity has many facets whose importance is still not sufficiently considered. It is essential to monitor the state of biodiversity in Belgium and its long-term evolution, and to improve our understanding of the role of biodiversity in ecosystem functioning. The gap between existing knowledge and the need for information for better policies for environmental conservation and sustainable consumption can only be filled through close cooperation between all biodiversity partners in Belgium

² Terms followed by an asterisk are defined in the glossary.

(see Annex 1, Biodiversity actors in Belgium). Given the unprecedented biodiversity crisis we face, we must enable, catalyse, and encourage urgent and transformative action at all levels of government and by all actors in society to halt and reverse biodiversity loss.

1.2. Why is biodiversity important?

Despite efforts in recent decades to protect and conserve habitats and species, much remains to be done to halt biodiversity decline in Belgium. Many sectors and stakeholders will need to be mobilised to meet global and European targets for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use by 2030.

BUT WHY IS BIODIVERSITY DECLINE A MAJOR PROBLEM?

The current rate of biodiversity extinction poses a direct threat to human well-being, as biodiversity plays a crucial role as a provider of products and services that make life on earth possible, and it meets the needs of human society. Moreover, the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment has been recognised as a human right by the United Nations since 2022. The following table summarises some of the key services provided by biodiversity (based on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). However, the case for protecting biodiversity should not be limited to what biodiversity can do for humanity. We have an ethical responsibility to preserve biodiversity because of its intrinsic values: each species has its own value 'in and for itself' as a result of the evolution of life on earth. Biodiversity has an intrinsic value independent of what it can offer in terms of direct benefits. Every living species is the result of a long evolutionary process and has its own reason for existence, which deserves respect and preservation. So protecting biodiversity is not just a matter of human survival.

The total cost of biodiversity loss and/or degradation is difficult to estimate, but available data show that it is huge and constantly increasing. We can hardly put a value on biodiversity per se, but we can put a value on the ecosystems for which biodiversity

plays an essential and crucial role. Of most of the services provided by nature, no monetary value can be estimated, or they are economically invisible. The IPBES Global Assessment Report (2019) refers to the concept of economic valuation of nature's contribution to people in chapter 2.3. According to the report, economists have developed various valuation methods to determine the monetary value of nature's contribution to people. Such economic valuation has certain advantages (e.g. monetary values are easy for policymakers to understand and make it possible to compare different ecosystem services), but it also has major drawbacks. For instance, there are concerns that economic valuation methods unfairly favour the rich over the poor because they depend on willingness to pay. It can also lead to some components of biodiversity being overvalued relative to others based on subjective choices. Some critics also point out that spiritual and religious values are not sufficiently taken into account. Moreover, many ecosystem services are not fully replaceable, some are even irreplaceable, and their loss can have profound and irreversible consequences for ecological integrity and human well-being. Natural capital places ecological limits on our economic systems.

Businesses around the world are beginning to recognise that climate change and degradation will become the most critical risk factor for the development of their operations in the coming years (WEF report 2019). Investing in preventing land degradation and restoring degraded land makes economic sense. On average, the benefits of restoration are 10 times higher than the costs (IPBES, 2018).

The complex web of life that is biodiversity is increasingly recognised as a cornerstone of global stability and prosperity. The multiple impacts of biodiversity loss go beyond purely ecological considerations and extend to the economic, social and health spheres. For instance, more than 75% of the world's food crops depend on animal pollination (IPBES, 2016). According to the World Economic Forum, 50% of the global economy is threatened by biodiversity loss.

An analysis by Vivid Economics in collaboration with the London Natural History Museum has shown that taking action now to protect nature is much cheaper and prevents greater economic loss than a

Services	Description	Examples of links with human well-being
Support services (biodiversity safeguards ecosystem functions that provide services such as the water cycle, photosynthesis and oxygen production, soil protection and enrichment, nutrient cycling, etc.)	Regulatory services	• protection against natural disasters (e.g. mangrove forests provide an excellent buffer against floods and storms; wetlands play an important role in mitigating floods and drought, etc.). • protection against soil erosion • health (disturbances in the functioning of ecosystems can affect the transmission of diseases to humans in various ways) • water supply • Agriculture (soil health through plants, bacteria, fungi)
	Biodiversity supports ecosystem functions, providing vital environmental services such as water and air purification, pollination, seed dispersal and so on.	
	2. supply services	• food security (biodiversity is the primary source of food: fish, edible crops and plants, livestock, etc.). • health (ecosystem services form the basis of our medicine, whether "traditional medicines" or "modern medicines" from natural sources) • various sources of income (biodiversity is essential to maintain the long-term viability of agriculture, forestry and fisheries and is the basis of many industrial processes and the production of new medicines)
	Biomimicry: models from nature are a source of inspiration for new designs and processes aimed at solving human problems.	• using the composition, structure and function of organisms, substances, mechanisms or biological processes to develop similar products using artificial mechanisms that mimic natural ones
	3. Cultural	- social relations - source of various types of income (recreational use, arts and ecotourism* bring significant direct and indirect economic benefits)
	Biodiversity contributes to people's spiritual well-being. The beauty of biodiversity gives pleasure, is an important source of inspiration and is part of the spiritual heritage of many cultures.	
	Biodiversity provides symbols that embody cultural identity.	

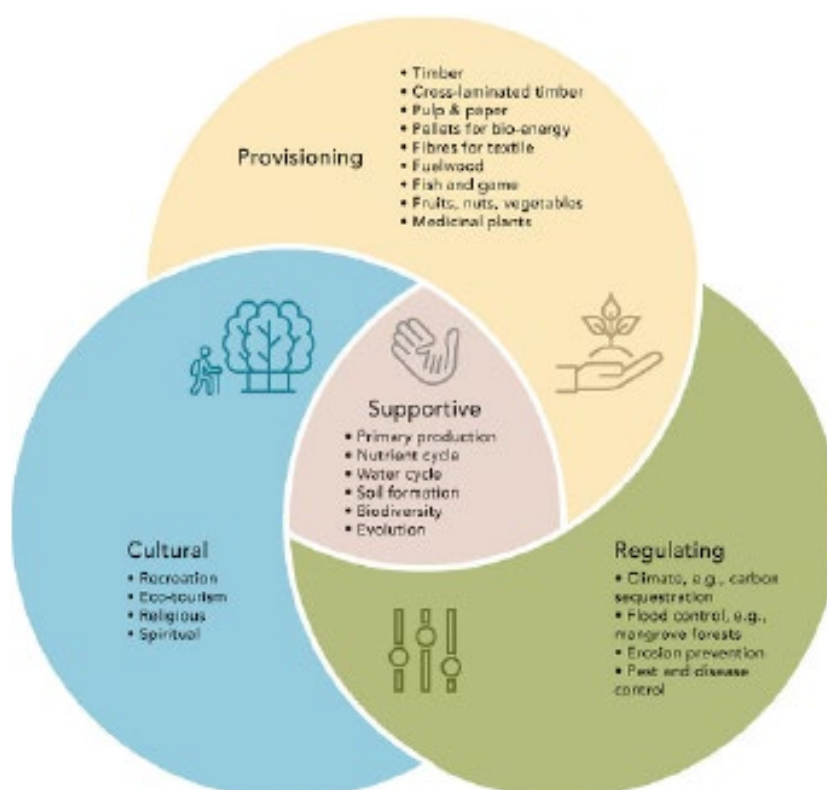


Figure 1. General categories of ecosystem services according to the Millennium Assessment classification, with examples. Kramer, K. *et al.* (2022), Roadmap to develop a stress test for forest ecosystem services supply. *One Earth*. 5. 25-34. DOI:10.1016/j.oneear.2021.12.009

delayed response. Even a 10-year delay would more than double the social cost of taking action, from about 8% to 17% of current global GDP (Smale, R. & Purvis, A., 2021).

A concrete example of the consequences of biodiversity loss can be seen in human health. Human activities disrupt both the structure and functions of ecosystems, which in turn can alter interactions between organisms and alter their physical and chemical environment. Infectious diseases are susceptible to these disruptions. Human-induced changes in ecosystems increase the risk and impact of infectious disease transmission.³

1.3. Current state of biodiversity in Belgium

HABITATS

Belgium's surface area comprises 30,528 km² of land and 3,462 km² in the North Sea. For such a small territory, Belgium has a relatively high diversity of habitats and species. Flanders, Brussels and northern Wallonia belong to the Atlantic biogeographic region. The region south of the Sambre and Meuse valleys is part of the Continental region, while the marine waters belong to the Atlantic marine region. The main habitat types found in Belgium are deciduous and coniferous forests, grasslands, heathland, peat bogs, wetlands, lakes and rivers and shallow sandbanks in the North Sea. Their distribution varies from region to region. For example, we find about 80% of the forested area in the south of the country. On the other hand, the north of Belgium is known for its semi-natural grasslands, wetlands, heaths and sea dunes.

³ Connecting global priorities: biodiversity and human health: a state of knowledge review. © World Health Organization and Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2015

The geographical and geological characteristics of Belgium (high plains in the Ardennes in the south, the valleys of the major rivers (Meuse and Scheldt), the fertile loamy areas in the centre and the low-lying polders along the coast), combined with the long-standing human influence through the use of the land, resulted in a great diversity of natural to semi-natural habitats, many of which are of European importance. Currently, as many as 58 of them are listed in the EU Habitats Directive and protected under the Natura 2000 network. The Natura 2000 network currently covers 12.7% of Belgium's land territory and 38% of its marine area. Habitat trends are assessed under Article 17 reporting of the EU Habitats Directive. The overall assessment of conservation status is as follows: 4.3% of Belgian habitats of European importance have a favourable conservation status*; 15% have an unadapted, 79.5% a poor and 1% an unknown status. However, between 2007 and 2018, the status of 19 habitats previously assessed as having an unfavourable conservation status improved, as did that of some species listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives (INBO, 2019).

TYPES

Belgium's diversity of life forms includes about 36,300 recorded species of micro-organisms, plants, fungi and animals. However, expert extrapolations suggest that the actual number hovers between 52,000 and 55,000 species. These figures do not take into account bacteria and cyanobacteria. Some 6,000 species of bacteria are known worldwide, but this could be only a fraction of the actual number. Since many bacteria are cosmopolitan, we assume that at least a few thousand are present in Belgium. In addition, some 300 species of cyanobacteria have been found in Belgium; many more are expected to be discovered. Consequently, the total number of species living in Belgium may exceed 55,000 (Peeters *et al.*, 2003). This figure exceeds all previous estimates and indicates that currently less than two-thirds of the species living in our country have been recorded. Moreover, our knowledge is incomplete and less than 4% of the species living in Belgium have been studied in detail. The best-known species are the vascular plants (flowering plants, conifers, ferns, horsetails, rush ferns and wolf claws), mosses, macroalgae and macro lichens, vertebrates (fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals), ground beetles, butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies.

They are very often used to support and justify conservation measures; a large number of species are also well known bioindicators. Further broadening our knowledge of the remaining 96% organisms would improve, refine and optimise Belgian conservation policies and actions.

Close monitoring and a thorough comparison of old collection and observation data with more recent ones show that many species in Belgium are declining or have even already disappeared. Depending on the group and the region of the country, the number of endangered species is estimated to be between 20% and 70%. Trends in the species listed in the EU Habitats Directive are evaluated for the period 2013-2018 as part of the Article 17 reporting of the EU Habitats Directive. The overall results for species of European importance show that 35% have a poor conservation status, 31% an inappropriate and 25% a favourable status. Not enough information is available for 8% of species (EEA State of Nature Report, 2020). In Belgium, as in 6 other member states, the assessment of species with a poor conservation status exceeds 30%.

Based on an assessment of 7,725 species indigenous to Belgium, nearly a third of them are estimated to be rare, threatened (from near threatened to critically endangered) or extinct at the national level (Living Planet Report, WWF 2020). In the Living Planet Report 2020, WWF and its partners drew up a Living Planet Index (LPI) for Belgium for the first time. This index is an indicator of the evolution of biodiversity in our country. It measures the average change in population size of 283 animal species, ranging from reptiles to grasshoppers and butterflies, over the period 1990-2018. The Belgian LPI shows a slight increase (+0.2% per year) for the period 1990-2018 and stability over the last 10 years. Although the Belgian LPI shows an overall trend of moderate increase, there are significant differences in the trend of population sizes of the 283 species: the populations of 28% of species have decreased in number, 28% have remained stable and 41% of species have increased. The report provides an overview of the evolution of biodiversity in Belgium and its different regions.

The main processes that threaten the country's biodiversity are briefly described in the next chapter. Pressures on biodiversity are similar across the country, although the intensity varies from region



to region. A full overview of the state and trends of biodiversity in Belgium is available for each region of Belgium and the North Sea: “L’environnement wallon en 10 infographies 2023”⁴, “Le rapport sur l’état de la nature 2022”⁵ (Rapport sur la nature de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale) and “Natuur Rapport 2023”⁶ provide up-to-date data for the three regions.

GENETIC DIVERSITY AND *EX SITU* CONSERVATION*

In Belgium, no comprehensive overview of genetic resources has been made so far. The state of conservation of the genetic diversity of crops and livestock and of harvested tree species, fish, micro-organisms and wildlife is the subject of several programmes in Belgium. Our zoos, botanical gardens, microbial cultures and universities coordinate or collaborate in various international *ex situ* conservation programmes, such as breeding programmes that aim to reintroduce endangered species worldwide.

I.4. Threats to biodiversity

The speed at which nature has changed globally over the past 50 years is unprecedented in human history. The direct drivers of biodiversity loss are: changes in land and sea use, direct exploitation of organisms, climate change, pollution and the invasion of alien species (Global Assessment, IPBES 2019). These five direct drivers result from a set of underlying causes - the indirect drivers - which are in turn underpinned by societal values and behaviours, including production and consumption patterns, human population dynamics and trends, trade, technological

innovations and the effectiveness of governance at local, national and global levels.

Since 1970, land-use changes have had relatively the greatest negative impact on nature for terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems. They have mainly been at the expense of forests, wetlands and grasslands and have led to habitat destruction and fragmentation. More than half of the coastline (dune habitat) has been destroyed for buildings, gardens and roads over the past century. Between 2013 and 2019, 5.1 hectares were covered with concrete every day in Flanders (Poelmans *et al.*, 2021). In 36 years, between 1985 and 2021, man-made land increased by 562 km² (or +44.6%), corresponding to an average growth of 15.6 km² /year, or 4.3 ha/day in Wallonia.⁷

Direct exploitation, especially overexploitation, of plants, animals and organisms through harvesting, hunting, fishing and slaughter has led to population decline, species extinction and habitat destruction/fragmentation. Overfishing of commercial fish stocks is still a sad reality in the North Sea. Some species, such as whiting, are still being fished in unsustainable quantities⁸. After years of overfishing, cod is still struggling to achieve sufficiently high reproductive rates. Fishing activities also result in by-catches that put heavy pressure on other species that are not intentionally fished, such as the harbour porpoise. Seabed habitats and their biodiversity are under severe pressure from beam trawling, the most common fishing practice in Belgian marine waters. Brussels airport, one of the 15 busiest airports in the EU in terms of commercial flights, provides opportunities for legal and illegal wildlife trade. Mining is a growing threat to biodiversity and this pressure will only increase in the coming years, namely because of the needs arising from the energy and digital transition.

Climate change directly threatens biodiversity, disrupts ecological relationships, unbalances ecosystem function and disrupts the life cycle or dynamics of some species (especially birds). Climate change has contributed to widespread influences on many aspects of biodiversity, including the distribution

⁴ L’environnement wallon en 10 infographies 2023 (FR): http://etat.environnement.wallonie.be/files/Infographie_2021/L'environnement%20wallon%20en%2010%20infographies.pdf (NL): <http://etat.environnement.wallonie.be/files/Publications/EEW%20en%2010%20Infographies%20-%20Traductions/Het%20Waalse%20milieu%20in%2010%20info-grafieken.pdf>

⁵ Le rapport sur l’état de la nature 2022 : https://document.environnement.brussels/opac_css/elecfile/SYNTH_Etat_Nature_2022_FR_DEF.pdf - https://document.environnement.brussels/opac_css/elecfile/SAMEN_Staat_Natuur_2022_NL_DEF.pdf

⁶ Nature Report 2023 : https://purews.inbo.be/ws/portalfiles/portal/98119999/Natuurrapport2023_INBO.pdf

⁷ See: <http://etat.environnement.wallonie.be/contents/indicationsheets/TERRIT%201.html>

⁸ Belgian State. Update of the initial assessment for Belgian marine waters. Marine Strategy Framework Directive - Art 8 para 1a & 1b. Brussels; 2018.

of species, their phenology, population dynamics, community structure and ecosystem function. This factor increasingly amplifies the impact of other factors on nature. The effects of climate change are becoming increasingly visible. In Belgium, the average temperature increased by 2°C between 1830 and 2010 (IEA, 2023). Moreover, the frequency, intensity and duration of heat waves have increased. Our forests, which are not adapted to recurring dry periods, are in big trouble. Under the influence of climate change, certain insects emerge earlier in the season, disrupting other species that feed on them. This is the case in Belgium for the black flycatcher. Moreover, the IPCC and IPBES clearly warn that actions to limit climate change and reduce CO₂ emissions can sometimes contribute to the collapse of biodiversity, underlining the importance of fighting biodiversity loss as part of the fight against climate change (IPBES-IPCC, 2021).⁹

Pollution in its various forms (chemicals, pesticides, plastics, noise, light and waste) has significant negative effects on the quality of fresh water, soil and sea water, and on the atmosphere as a whole, affecting species. Environmental degradation puts great pressure on flora and fauna, but can also affect humans, for instance through the food chain. Light and noise pollution are pollutants that are often overlooked, poorly understood and poorly regulated. Artificial light at night can have negative effects on species such as bats, frogs, eels and other fish species. Light pollution disturbs and disrupts hunting, migration and reproductive activities. Man-made noise is also a source of pollution and can disturb wildlife (bats, porpoises, etc.). In particular, it disrupts interaction between individuals, e.g. between prey and predators, and reproduction. Unlike light and noise pollution, plastic pollution has received a lot of attention from political decision-makers, the media and the general public. According to a research project by ILVO and RBINS¹⁰, most fish and shellfish in the Belgian North Sea are currently a safe food source

in terms of microplastics contamination. However, concentrations of microplastics in the seabed and seawater can be quite high in some areas, and plastic fibres seem to be evenly distributed in our part of the North Sea.

Invasions of exotic species have increased by 40 per cent since 1980 and are directly related to increased trade and human population dynamics. The introduction and establishment of invasive species poses a significant risk to native species and ecosystem functions. According to the IPBES Assessment of Invasive Exotic Species (2023), 85% of the impacts of biological invasions on native species are negative. The rate of introduction of new Invasive Alien Species (IAS) appears to be higher than ever and shows no signs of slowing down (Global Assessment, IPBES 2019). In Belgium's coastal waters, invasive exotic species form a dominant part of the marine fauna. They compete with native species, hunt them or hybridise with them, alter the original habitat and significantly change the overall composition and abundance of species. Airports and seaports are an important point of arrival for exotic species because of the concentration of transport activities and opportunities for contact. In recent decades, many invasive species have been unintentionally introduced and established on our territory (e.g. raccoon, Asian ladybird, Asian hornet). Despite their negative impact on biodiversity, invasive exotic species can also have an impact on agriculture, food and water security, the economy, animal health and public health (IPBES, 2023).

In the past 50 years, the human population has doubled, the global economy has grown by a factor of almost 4 and world trade by a factor 10. All this has led to increased demand for energy and materials, with consequences for nature and its contributions to humans. Economic incentives have generally promoted the expansion of economic activities and have often damaged the environment rather than encouraged nature conservation or restoration. Integrating the multiple values of ecosystem functions and nature's contribution to humans into economic incentives has been shown to lead to better environmental, economic and social outcomes in the economy (Global Assessment, IPBES 2019). Other

⁹ IPBES-IPCC, (2021) co-sponsored workshop report on biodiversity and climate change; IPBES and IPCC. DOI:10.5281/zenodo.4782538

¹⁰ ILVO communication no. 276: Microplastics in seafood from Belgian fisheries areas.



causes of pressure on biodiversity include increasing recreational pressure on green areas (especially in Brussels) and sand and gravel extraction in the sea and some rivers.

In Belgium, habitat loss and degradation, fragmentation and pollution - especially eutrophication - are the greatest threats to biodiversity. Figure 2 illustrates the percentages of threatened species in eight major classes in Belgium. Some of the threats are methodological or institutional, such as the lack of ecological and taxonomic knowledge of various aspects of biodiversity, and the fragmentation of powers in Belgium that hinders rapid action and coordinated initiatives.

Belgium mainly influences biodiversity abroad, either

indirectly through pollution generated in our country, or directly through the import of projects and developments abroad, supported or generated by Belgian private companies or public authorities, e.g. in the industrial and tourism sectors. More than 95% of the impact of Belgian consumption on global biodiversity loss is abroad (Nature Report INBO, 2020). As the IPBES Assessment Report on Land Degradation and Restoration (2018) points out, the global impact of consumption choices on land degradation is often not visible globally due to the distances many consumers and producers can separate them from each other. This means that many actors who benefit from the overexploitation of natural resources are among those least affected by the direct negative impacts of land degradation, and therefore least incentivised to take action.



Part II: The Belgian political framework

II.1. International environmental treaties ratified by Belgium

Belgium has ratified a number of legally binding agreements that demonstrate its commitment to protecting biodiversity.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the first international instrument that addresses biodiversity in a global and comprehensive context¹¹. The three objectives of the CBD are (1) the conservation of biodiversity, (2) the sustainable use of its components and (3) the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. The CBD is considered an overarching instrument to address biodiversity issues. It is complemented by two protocols (the Nagoya Protocol and the Cartagena Protocol).

The CBD is a framework agreement that defines general goals and policies. Due to its wide scope, the CBD acts as an umbrella treaty for several more focused international and European treaties and agreements. For this reason, this strategy relies primarily on the CBD and related decisions taken by the Conference of the Parties (COP), while also taking into account other relevant international agreements related to biodiversity.

Other international conventions related to biodiversity of which Belgium is a member include the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar), the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO) and the International Plant Protection Convention, as well as the International Whaling Commission (IWC).

Belgium is also a member of the Intergovernmental Platform for Science and Policy on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

¹¹ Belgium signed the treaty on 5 June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, and ratified it on 22 November 1996.

Appendix 2 provides more information on international agreements directly applicable to biodiversity.

II.2 Competent authorities in Belgium

Belgium has evolved into a federal state. There are currently three complementary authorities: the federal government, the regional governments (the Flemish Region, the Brussels-Capital Region and the Walloon Region) and the communities (the French Community, the Flemish Community and the German-speaking Community), each with its own parliament and government. More information can be found in the overview of the main Belgian actors in Annex 1.

From a legal point of view, Belgium's federal government, communities and regions are equivalent, but their decision-making powers and competences lie in different domains.

As the regions are competent for territorial matters such as environment and nature conservation, the implementation of measures on nature conservation and biodiversity conservation in Belgium is mainly a regional competence, with the exception of the North Sea environment, where the federal government is the competent authority. The federal level is involved in the external dimension of biodiversity agreements and is responsible for coordinating the preparation of the Belgian position at the international level. The federal level has specific environmental competences (CITES, trade in exotic species, product standards), other competences related to the environment and biodiversity (development cooperation, finance, economy, etc.) and pressure resources (public procurement, taxation, etc.). The federal government is competent for North Sea matters including the environment, while competence for fisheries lies with the Flemish Region. The communities are competent for culture and education, but the regions and the federal government can also play an important role in raising public awareness within their own areas of competence.

Figure 2 summarises the distribution of competences in Belgium and their impact on biodiversity-related issues.

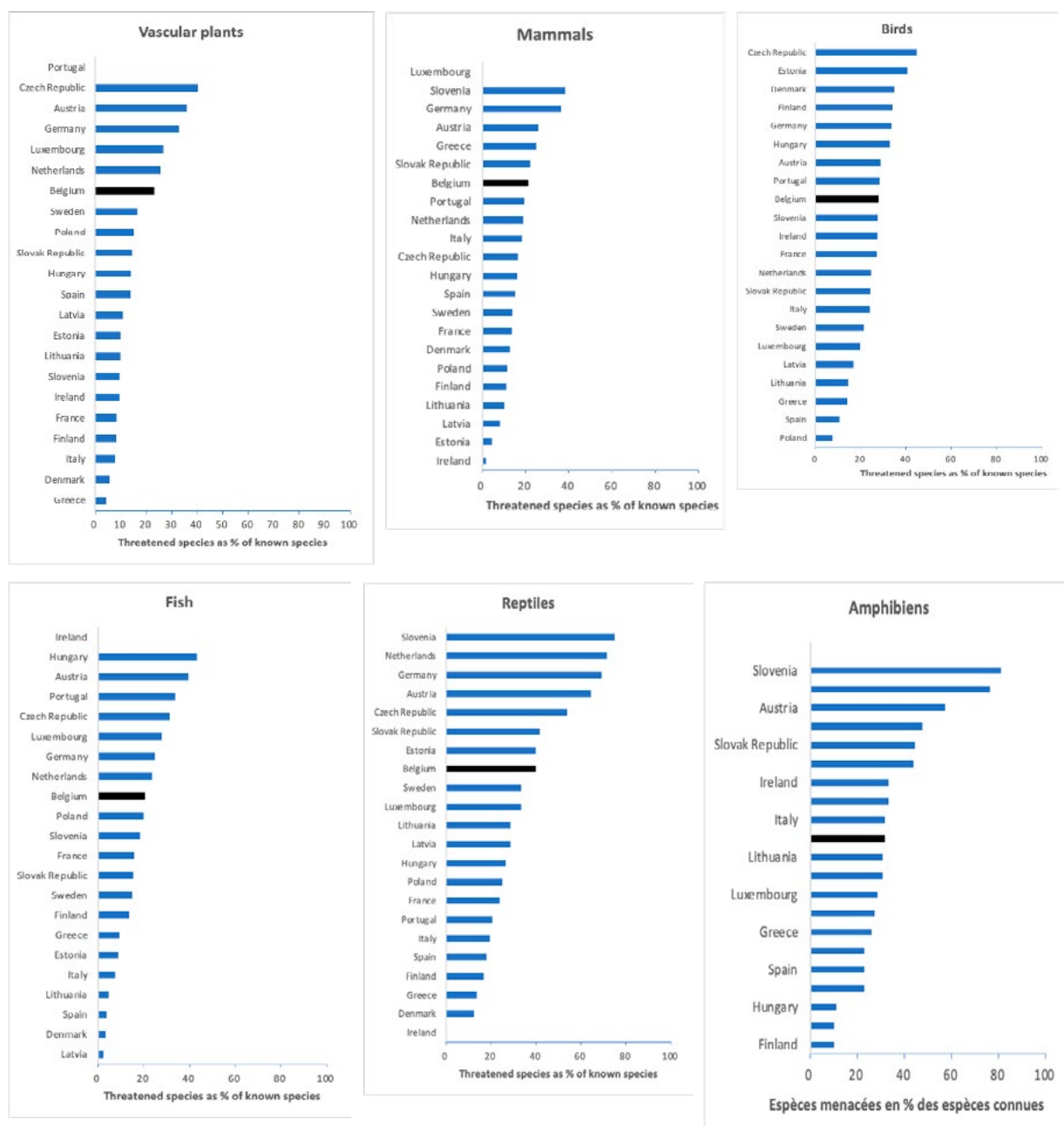


Figure 2. Percentage of threatened species in Belgium and other European countries among vascular plants, mammals, birds, fish, amphibians and reptiles (Source: OECD (2024), “Biodiversity: Threatened species”, OECD Environment Statistics (database), <https://doi.org/10.1787/data-00605-en> (accessed on 26 May 2024)).¹

¹ See: <http://stats.oecd.org/> and <https://data-explorer.oecd.org/>

II.3 Place of the strategy in the Belgian political context and its implementation

This NBS uses the K-M GBF as a guide and reference. It also takes into account relevant European strategies and biodiversity-related strategies. In this way, Belgium will contribute to these global and European agendas through strategies, policy approaches, plans and numerous biodiversity actions already underway or to be launched. The NBS should therefore be seen as a framework document that primarily builds on these existing plans. It

defines strategic political directions to improve the implementation of biodiversity commitments and create more coherence, fill gaps where initiatives are not fully implemented or do not achieve the desired objectives, and optimise the integration of biodiversity concerns at national and international levels. The overarching goal of this strategy is the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity. Below is a brief overview of the various plans and programmes elaborated by the regional and federal governments.

The NBS is indicative and does not create binding rules for competent authorities. However, deviations from the plan's requirements must be justified.

THE FLEMISH REGION

At the beginning of each legislature, the Flemish Government draws up a coalition agreement, the Flemish Coalition Agreement. In addition, the Flemish ministers draft a political note, the Policy Note¹² for the area for which they are responsible. These two documents serve as policy documents, with the second reflecting the main strategic plans to implement the Flemish Coalition Agreement.¹³ Biodiversity falls primarily under the competence of the Minister for the Environment, but is also integrated into other relevant areas.

The aim of Flemish nature policy is to protect, develop, manage and restore nature and the natural environment, preserve or restore the quality of the environment and create social support, promoting public knowledge of nature conservation. It describes the following short-term operational objectives (within the plan period):

- A net increase in high-quality nature and forest everywhere and close by for everyone, including an additional 20,000 ha of nature under effective nature management by 2024. And by 2030, we will plant 10,000 ha of additional forest, including 4,000 ha during the current parliament (2019-2024). Conservation objectives and Natura 2000 policy

- More nature and forests to combat climate change
- Nature is everywhere - through interweaving and connection, blue-green networks and ecosystem services.
- Integrated area-based work for nature and landscape.
- We strengthen the natural character of the coast
- Focus on green in the Flemish periphery

- Effective species policy and management
- We make nature and nature experience a connecting element in society.
- A scientific basis and evaluation for effective biodiversity policy.
 - Nature and biodiversity in the context of climate change adaptation and mitigation policies
 - Increasing knowledge for effective management of invasive alien species
 - Expanding knowledge of nature in agroecosystems to improve management of open spaces
 - Exploring nature in cities to improve habitability
 - Natural capital
 - Knowledge to optimise biodiversity policy and management

These objectives are set out in official political documents such as the Blue Deal Decree, the strategic vision Beleidsplan Ruimte Vlaanderen (S-BRV), the Forest Expansion Plan, the Wild Pollinators Action Plan, a renewed action plan on sustainable use of pesticides, the hedgerow plan, species protection plans, the Flemish Adaptation Plan (VAP), the Local Energy and Climate Pact (LEKP), the Programmatic Approach to Nitrogen (PAN).

Besides the policy documents, specific objectives, targets and actions for nature, forest and green space are described in the annual operational plan of the Agency for Nature and Forests. In this plan, the Agency for Nature and Forests has drawn up a strategic map showing the strategic objectives and programmes, permanent missions and management objectives. The three strategic objectives,

¹² Policy note of the Flemish Minister for the Environment (2019-2024) : <https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/32243> (in Dutch)

¹³ Flemish government coalition agreement (2019-2024): <https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/31741> (in Dutch)

Distribution of powers	General description	Powers ¹	Main links with biodiversity issues
Federal government	Powers related to common heritage ¹ and public interest in the widest sense	Public finances, defence, federal aspects of economic and energy policy, gendarmerie, justice, foreign affairs and development aid, science policy, large parts of public health and home affairs, social affairs, social security (unemployment, pensions, child benefits, health insurance), monetary policy, price and income policy, customs, protection of savings, nuclear energy, construction agency, railways, public enterprises, federal aspects of the environment, protection of the North Sea, Belgium's obligations to international institutions, including the European Union and NATO. The federal state is also competent for matters not explicitly within the competence of the regions or communities.	Coordination of Belgian positions at international level, access and benefit sharing, integration into sectoral policies, scientific and technical cooperation in its areas of competence, research and education in federal institutions, import - export and transit of alien species (including CITES), biotechnology (e.g. field trials, deliberate release, import and export of GMOs), marketing conditions, conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Belgian part of the North Sea and in other areas under federal jurisdiction, <i>ex situ</i> conservation*, e.g. in federal scientific institutions, information exchange and public awareness in areas of competence, support to developing countries, e.g. for the implementation of the CBD and other MEAs.
Region governments	Powers in sectors related to their own region or territory in the widest sense	Economic policy, employment, agriculture, water policy, housing, public works, energy, transport (except Belgian railways), environment, nature conservation (including forests), spatial planning, rural regeneration, regional aspects of credit policy and foreign trade, supervision of provinces, municipalities and intercommunal companies. They are also responsible for scientific research, development aid and international relations in these areas.	Measures for everything relating to nature conservation, forestry and sustainable use on Belgian territory, inventory and monitoring, <i>in situ</i> * and <i>ex situ</i> conservation, applied research, scientific and technical cooperation in fields of competence, incentive measures, environmental impact assessment, exchange of information, contribution to Belgian positions at international level, integration into sectoral policies, permits for contained use of GMOs.
Community governments	Powers are based on the concept of 'language' and language is 'dependent on the individual'	Culture (theatres, libraries, audiovisual media, etc.), education, the use of languages, issues concerning the individual related to health policy (curative and preventive medicine) on the one hand and assistance to individuals on the other (youth protection, social assistance, family assistance, immigrant assistance services, etc.), as well as competences related to scientific research, development assistance and international relations in these fields.	Education, public awareness, basic research, scientific and technical cooperation in areas of expertise.

¹ Based on information on the Belgian federal government portal and the Belgian federal portal (<http://www.belgium.be>).

biodiversity, perception of nature and enhancement of biodiversity, form the basis of its operation and also respond to the objectives of sustainable development.

Since the Nature Decree came into force in 1998, the Institute for Nature and Forest Research (INBO) has been tasked with reporting on the state of nature in Flanders, analysing future scenarios and evaluating past protection policies. To this end, it publishes the Nature Report every two or three years. In addition to the report, a set of nature indicators is updated every year. These indicators are closely linked to SEBI's European biodiversity indicators¹⁴. The indicators are published and regularly updated on the Biodiversity Indicators website.

The fourth Flemish Sustainable Development Strategy (VSDO)¹⁵ was approved by the Flemish government on 26 November 2021 as a successor to the first strategy from 2006. The strategy, built around a central vision for 2050, provides a framework for Flemish policy on sustainable development. This vision for 2050, together with "Vizier 2030. A 2030 Objectives Framework for Flanders", forms the basis of the VSDO. The 2030 framework is a Flemish translation of the SDGs and an intermediate step towards what Flanders wants to achieve by 2050. Biodiversity is an integral part of the VSDO.¹⁶

THE BRUSSELS-CAPITAL REGION

The Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (GPDO) is a strategic orientation plan adopted in 2018 that describes the challenges of spatial planning in Brussels. In this plan, the Brussels government proposes a number of specific projects related to the protection of biodiversity in semi-natural areas, strengthening the connectivity of ecological networks, preserving and developing the layout of green islands, etc.

Since 1 March 2012, the Order on Nature Conservation has formed the legal basis for the Natura 2000 process. This ordinance brings together all Brussels

nature legislation into a single framework. In 2016, the Brussels-Capital Region introduced a Nature Plan containing 7 objectives to reconcile urban development and nature.

Regional Pesticide Reduction Programme (GPPR, 2023-2027) aims to significantly reduce the risks and use of pesticides in the region, both by managers of public spaces and professionals and individuals. The measures of the GPPR are closely linked to other conservation plans and programmes in the region.

The Strategy for Pollinating and Beneficial Insects (2023-2030) includes some 50 measures aimed in particular at improving knowledge of the status of different species of pollinating insects, in particular by updating the various existing maps and regularly assessing available food resources. A second axis presents numerous concrete measures to create habitats favourable to pollinating insects, for example by greening built-up areas, increasing the number of flower strips, especially on roadsides, reducing the risks and use of pesticides and diversifying planting in public spaces and improving their management.

The Water Management Plan (2022-2027) is a planning tool designed to provide an integrated and comprehensive response to all challenges related to water management (rivers, ponds, groundwater, drinking water supply, flooding, etc.), as well as to the city's water resources. This third version of the water management plan aims to increase the city's resilience in the face of climate change.

THE WALLOON REGION

In its Regional Policy 2019-2024, the Walloon Government committed to implement a "Biodiversité 360°" for Wallonia, based in particular on the results of Biodiversity Workshops. This strategy will set ambitious targets for the legislature and more generally for the decade 2020-2030. All Walloon stakeholders will be involved in its implementation, at regional and local levels, in the various activities.

The "Stratégie à 360° pour la biodiversité" includes several strategic and operational objectives aimed at:

- 1) Maintain biodiversity and restore degraded species populations and natural habitats;

¹⁴ SEBI: Streamlining European Biodiversity Indicators, see

¹⁵ The full Flemish Sustainable Development Strategy is available at <https://beslissingenvlaamsereregering.vlaanderen.be/document-view/61A09A14364ED90008000146>.

¹⁶ <https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/27333>

- 2) Integrate biodiversity into development strategies and economic activities and promote the sustainable use of biodiversity;
- 3) Enhance biodiversity and mobilise all players in society in favour of biodiversity;
- 4) Implement actions at the local level and promote them internationally.
- 5) Understanding biodiversity and monitoring field activities.

At the operational level, no fewer than 86 concrete actions are planned. These include actions to encourage the creation of nature reserves, to prevent and limit the impact of invasive alien species, to restore watercourses and wetlands, to take better account of biodiversity along roads, to support the creation of urban green spaces, to promote agro-ecological agricultural practices, to preserve old-growth forests, to better integrate biodiversity in schools and to optimise data collection. After a public review in summer 2023, the strategy will be finally approved by the Walloon government.

Wallonia, like the other Belgian entities, is contributing to the implementation of the EU 2030 biodiversity strategy through the “Pledge” (whose targets are to establish 30% protected areas, 10% of which are strictly protected, and to improve the conservation status of habitats and species of Community interest). The proposals are currently being finalised.

The Walloon Environmental Code contains provisions related to biodiversity; according to the first principle, the environment includes spaces, landscapes, natural resources and climate, air, soil, water, biological diversity and balance. The code states that the region's environmental policy is based on the principle of preventive action. The second principle states that the region and other authorities are the managers of the environment and guarantee its conservation and, if necessary, restoration. Moreover, everyone must protect and contribute to the environment. These requirements should be integrated into the definition and implementation of the region's other policies.

The right to access environmental information is enshrined in the Environment Act.

THE FEDERAL LEVEL

The first and second Federal Plan for Sustainable Development pay special attention to biodiversity. The first Federal Plan for Sustainable Development 2000-2004 (FPSD1) mentions several strategies in the area of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use and in the area of biosecurity. It also refers to national and international integration and coordination measures, sensitisation and the need for scientific knowledge. This plan is the first strategic document approved by the federal government that refers to a biodiversity strategy and a national action plan. The Second Federal Plan for Sustainable Development 2004-2008 (FPSD2) was approved by the Federal Council of Ministers on 24 September 2004. Action 18 is dedicated to biodiversity and actions 19 and 20 relate to forests and marine waters.

Action 18 provides for the integration of biodiversity issues in four key sectors (transport, economy, development cooperation and research). For each sector, the relevant federal administrations have to draw up sectoral action plans. The Federal Plan for the integration of biodiversity in four key federal sectors 2009-2013 (adopted on 27/11/2009) was prepared in response to Action 18. This plan is also one of the government's contributions to the implementation of the Belgian NSB. For each action, the plan identifies the actor responsible for implementation, a timetable for implementation and a budget for implementation.

FPSD2 was extended until the adoption of the next plan. The federal government adopted the Third Federal Plan for Sustainable Development (FPSD3) on 1 October 2021. It is an important basis for the federal government's contribution to the implementation of the United Nations Agenda 2030 and the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the long-term vision for sustainable development adopted by the government in 2013. The first report of the Planning Bureau's Sustainable Development Task Force on the implementation of this third plan was published on 23 May 2023.

Belgium has a Law on Nature Conservation (Law of 12 July 2012 - amending the Law of 12 July 1973 on Nature Conservation). This law aims to preserve the inherent nature, diversity and intact character of the natural environment through measures to protect

flora and fauna, their communities and growing places, as well as soil, subsoil, water and air, including (regulatory) measures relating to the import, export and transit of non-native plant species and non-native animal species and their remains. In addition, Belgium has a CITES law (law of 28 July 1981) and a Royal Decree (9 April 2003) setting out the measures to be taken to implement the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora and its annexes, adopted on 3 March 1973 in Washington, and the Amendment to the Convention, adopted on 22 June 1979 in Bonn. As CITES covers both native and alien species, negotiations on a cooperation agreement with the regions are in the final stages. The Act of 27 December 2012 is a law containing various provisions relating to animal welfare, animal health and consumer health protection.

The federal level will support the implementation of the National Pollinator Strategy. The National Pollinator Strategy 2021-2030 adopted by the expanded Interministerial Conference on the Environment (ICE) is built around three pillars:

- 1) Making agriculture pollinator-friendly;
- 2) Make cities, infrastructures and spaces pollinator-friendly; and
- 3) Improving knowledge and awareness of the state of pollinators and the causes of their decline.

Specifically, these three pillars will enable us to improve the size, quality, diversity and connectivity of habitats to promote healthy pollinator communities across Belgium; mitigate the factors causing the decline of pollinator species and prevent their extinction; increase the resilience of all pollinators to climate change; raise awareness among the general public and key sectors; and improve cooperation among all stakeholders. Implementation of this strategy will help achieve the objectives of the Nature Restoration Act.

Belgium has updated its law on the protection of the marine environment in areas under Belgian jurisdiction (law of 16 December 2022). The main

aim of this law is to protect and, if necessary, restore the characteristics, biodiversity and integrity of the marine environment. The sustainable management of human activities at sea is part of the Marine Spatial Plan for the Belgian part of the North Sea. Stakeholder involvement plays a central role in the development of planning and management measures for human activities at sea. This policy option has the advantage of closely involving the various sea users and guaranteeing their support throughout the process. Specific actions are devoted to nature protection such as the designation of protected areas for the conservation of species and habitats. Besides Natura 2000 areas, the law of 16 December 2022 aims to organise spatial planning for marine areas. In April 2023, the Marine Environment Department of the FPS Environment organised an event to launch the Marine Spatial Plan revision process. This process should lead to the adoption of the third Belgian Marine Spatial Plan.

Besides managing marine Natura 2000 marine areas and possible future marine reserves, the Marine Environment Department is also responsible for supporting the national implementation of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD - 2008/56/EC). The transposition of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive into Belgian legislation took effect with the Royal Decree of 23.06.2010 on the marine strategy for the Belgian marine areas. The definition of good ecological status and environmental objectives for Belgian marine waters were updated in 2018. For each of the 11 descriptors defined by the Directive, including descriptor 1 on biodiversity and descriptor 2 on alien species, indicators and targets are specified to achieve good environmental status*.

The second programme of measures, which contributes to achieving the sustainable development objectives and the conservation objectives of the Birds and Habitats Directives, came into force in 2022. In addition, in May 2021, the Marine Environment Service presented its vision for nature restoration in the Belgian part of the North Sea in which forces have been combined to restore three crucial habitats: gravel banks, oyster banks aggregations of shell worm banks.



Part III: Guiding principles, concepts and approaches

The principles, concepts and approaches mentioned herein are considered the most relevant guiding principles for interpreting and implementing the strategy. Definitions of biodiversity and ecosystem services are covered in Section I.1 of the strategy. In addition, the many terms used in this chapter are defined in the Glossary.

1. PRINCIPLE OF PREVENTIVE ACTION

Biodiversity conservation is better ensured by preventing environmental damage than by repairing or compensating for it.

Example: if there is a reasonable alternative to the location of a project that threatens a site of high natural value, this alternative should be chosen instead of compensation for the destruction of the site.

2. PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE

Where there is a threat of significant reduction or loss of biodiversity, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for delaying cost-effective measures to avoid or minimise such a threat. (Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, 1992)

Example: In the early 2000s, when concerns were raised about the potential impact of GM crops on monarch butterflies, political decisions were guided by the precautionary principle. Despite the uncertain scientific evidence at the time, some countries restricted the planting of GM crops with specific traits on insect resistance to minimise potential damage to monarch butterfly populations.

3. POLLUTER PAYS PRINCIPLE

Those who cause damage to biodiversity must bear the cost of measures to prevent, eliminate or mitigate such damage. (Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Environment, 1972).

Example: In 1989, the Exxon Valdez oil spill occurred in Alaska, causing significant damage to marine ecosystems and wildlife. The tanker ran aground and lost more than 11 million litres of crude oil in Prince William Sound. Under the “polluter pays” principle, Exxon was held responsible for the clean-up and restoration work. The company paid billions

of dollars in fines, damages and environmental restoration costs to repair the impact on local biodiversity, including fish stocks, birds and marine mammals.

4. PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION JUSTICE IN ENVIRONMENTAL CASES

The public must have access to information on the environment. It must have the right to participate in environmental policy decision-making, and public input must be taken into account in decision-making. Judicial mechanisms in force must be accessible to the population, including organisations, so that they can challenge acts and omissions by private individuals and public authorities that violate laws relating to the environment.

These principles are at the heart of the UNECE Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters (Aarhus, 1998), to which Belgium is a Party.

A participatory environmental policy should ensure the development of a balanced consultative/directive environmental policy. The use of participatory techniques (Vandenabeele & Goorden, 2004) is recommended.

The term “public” here is to be understood in a broad sense and includes individuals as well as associations, organisations or groups such as governments, regional and local authorities and experts. Participation in environmental policy development and implementation should be open to the general public, even if it is not directly or legally involved. Public participation is an important element of the environmental decision-making process in Belgium. The environmental impact assessment includes a 30-day public participation period.

Examples: A public consultation was organised for 3 months in 2023 to consult the public during the preparation of the Walloon Biodiversity Strategy.

5. GOOD GOVERNANCE

‘Governance’ or governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which these decisions

are implemented. 'Good governance' comprises eight key characteristics¹⁷ It is participatory and consensual, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and non-discriminatory, and complies with the law. It ensures that corruption is minimised, minority views are taken into account and the voices of the weakest in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the current and future needs of society.

Examples: In recent decades, the dominant state-based model of protected area management has slowly been replaced by various forms of joint management, partnership agreements and community-based management. The powers and responsibilities associated with protected areas still lie mainly with governments and their agencies, but have also been taken over by stakeholders, NGOs and landowners, who often cooperate with each other.

6. SECTORAL INTEGRATION

The relevant decision-making processes in sectoral or cross-sectoral development policies, including the legislative process, plans, programmes and individual decisions, take biodiversity conservation and sustainable use into account.

Examples: A new five-year federal plan for sustainable development was approved on 1 October 2021, which provides for the integration of all aspects of biodiversity in six interdepartmental themes: social rights, health and resilience against risks, a reformed Belgian economy, a new mobility model, sustainable financing and international issues.

7. ECOSYSTEM APPROACH

The ecosystem approach is a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable manner. An ecosystem approach is based on the application of appropriate scientific methods focused on levels of biological organisation, which include the essential structure, processes, functions and interactions between organisms and their environment. It recognises that humans, with their cultural diversity, are an essential component of many ecosystems. The ecosystem

approach requires adaptive management* (CBD Decision V/6).

Example: The management of the Sonian Forest, near Brussels in Belgium, is an example of an ecosystem-based approach. Faced with the challenges of urbanisation and invasive species, the three regions signed a letter of intent in 2008 to implement a structure plan. This structure plan included creating buffer zones along forest edges, eliminating invasive species and reintroducing native plants. In addition, the plan involved local communities in activities such as tree planting and biodiversity monitoring, which promoted a collaborative approach to conservation. This holistic strategy aimed to maintain the ecological integrity of the forest while enabling sustainable recreational and educational activities.

8. ECOLOGICAL NETWORKS

An ecological network is a coherent system of representative core areas, linkages, stepping stones and buffer zones designed and managed to conserve biodiversity, maintain or restore ecosystem services and allow appropriate and sustainable use of natural resources through the interconnection of its material elements with the landscape and existing social and institutional structures.

Example: The "YES we plant" challenge launched in 2020 is one of the key measures in the Walloon government's regional policy statement 2019-2024. The challenge aims to plant 4,000 km of hedges in open areas and/or one million trees. Hedges and tree lines are corridors for birds, insects, mammals and plants and fulfil numerous functions. Cooperation between various Belgian entities has led to the creation of a 60 m wide ecoduct in the Sonian Forest. The ecoduct was designed to reconnect the parts of the forest separated by the Brussels ring road, thus counteracting habitat fragmentation.

The BiodiversiScape programme aims to integrate biodiversity into federal domains (Buildings Authority, Defence, SNCB and Infrabel) and, in particular, to strengthen green and blue screens and ecological corridors.

Protected areas usually form the core areas of ecological networks, although they may also consist of areas covered by management contracts with farmers or

¹⁷ Source: <http://www.unescap.org/huset/gg/governance.htm>

other land-use sectors. National and regional systems of protected areas are merged into a global network of protected areas, which implies the establishment of international coordination mechanisms to support the development and efficient long-term management of such networks (based on SBSTTA 9).

9. SUBSIDIARITY PRINCIPLE

The subsidiarity principle governs the exercise of power. This principle says that matters should be dealt with at the lowest appropriate level (local, regional or national) that is best placed to take efficient and effective action.

Example: In line with the subsidiarity principle, the European Directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment defines a minimum framework with the broad principles for the environmental assessment system and leaves the details to the Member States.

10. COMPENSATION PRINCIPLE

If, despite a negative assessment of impacts on biodiversity and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must still be implemented for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, public authorities must take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that there will be no net loss* of biodiversity when the plan or project is implemented or carried out. The definition of this concept comes from the European Habitats Directive.

It should therefore be understood in the context of each region's legal regime and its application to specific areas within that region.

Example: In Belgium, the construction of the A11 motorway included compensation measures to replace the natural habitats of species that would disappear as a result of a plan or project. As part of the project, existing meadows were rewetted and fields were converted into polder meadows.

Human rights are a set of fundamental and inalienable rights that every individual enjoys by virtue of being human. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, these rights encompass a wide range of freedoms and protections, such as the right to life, liberty, security, respect for human dignity and a clean and healthy environment (Article 3 and Article 28).

Under this biodiversity strategy, every objective aims to respect, protect and promote human rights. This includes the right to a healthy and sustainable environment, which is essential for the survival of species and the well-being of the human communities that depend on them.



Part IV: The updated strategy to 2030

IV.1 Vision and ambition

This National Biodiversity Strategy (NBS) aims to ensure a more effective and coherent implementation of the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) while simultaneously, and where relevant, taking into account commitments under other biodiversity agreements.

During the review of the NBS, we felt it was important to subsume the targets into a vision for the future because we want to halt biodiversity decline for the benefit of current and future generations. To help communicate the NBS target, an overall target, to be achieved by 2030, was adopted.

VISION TO 2050

By 2050, our biodiversity and the ecosystem services it provides - our natural capital - are valued, conserved and properly restored because of biodiversity's intrinsic value and its essential contribution to human well-being and economic prosperity.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE OF THE STRATEGY TO 2030

The overall objective is to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity to promote the restoration of nature, for the benefit of people and the planet, through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources, ensuring the necessary resources for implementation.

To achieve this overall objective, current Belgian and European legislative

framework on biodiversity fully implemented and enforced, pressure on biodiversity reduced, ecosystems restored, biological resources used sustainably and benefits arising from the use of genetic resources distributed fairly and equitably, relevant technologies transferred, financial resources provided, knowledge improved, biodiversity issues and values integrated, appropriate policies effectively implemented, while decision making based on sound scientific research and on the precautionary principle.

Ensuring that ecosystems are resilient and continue to provide essential services by 2030 will preserve

the diversity of life on earth and contribute to human well-being and poverty eradication.

IV.2 Strategic and operational objectives

To achieve the overall objective and contribute to the vision of this NBS, strategic and operational objectives have been set.

Most of the 15 strategic targets defined in the Belgian National Biodiversity Strategy 2013-2020¹⁸ remain unchanged as they include the steps needed to reach the 2030 target. They were therefore extended to 2030, as approved by the Interministerial Conference for the Environment on 30 January 2025.

Most of the changes to the strategic and operational targets are intended to better align the structure and content of our NBS with the global targets of the K-M GBF 2030 and at EU level with the four priorities of the European Biodiversity Strategy 2030. Target 2 still refers to processes and activities that threaten biodiversity, but focuses on the five main direct causes of biodiversity loss. Moreover, it no longer only calls for “studying” and “monitoring” the effects of these threats, but also for “remedying” them.

Target 12¹⁹ and target 14²⁰ of the NBS 2013-2020 have been deleted as their main elements are included in other operational targets. 2 new targets have been added to the NBS: target 7 on biosecurity measures and target 14 on full, fair, inclusive and effective representation and participation of diverse communities in biodiversity conservation.

The strategic objectives concern both biodiversity in Belgium and the impact of our activities in the rest of the world, especially through international cooperation and our economic activities. All strategic objectives are considered priorities. There is no relationship between the place of an objective

¹⁸ https://www.biodiv.be/sites/be/files/2023-11/EN-Strat_2020.pdf

¹⁹ Target 12: Influence the international agenda within conventions related to biodiversity

²⁰ Objective 14: Promote the involvement of cities, provinces and other local governments in the implementation of NBS 2020

and its importance or urgency compared to another objective. Each agency is competent to determine the degree of priority given to the different strategic objectives in this document. Some specific issues (such as GMOs, biofuels, climate change, invasive alien species) are addressed horizontally across the different objectives of the strategy. Belgium will strive to implement the operational objectives by 2030 at the latest

When implementing the strategy, the federal and regional governments pay special attention to stakeholder information, involvement and participation. This implies consultation and cooperation among the various stakeholders, which will increase support and give impetus to the implementation of the strategy. Collaboration and partnerships with stakeholders on concrete projects related to the objectives of the strategy also help to attract their interest (e.g. legal framework on thematic issues, joint Life+ projects, joint studies, joint CEPA activities towards stakeholders and the public). We aim to engage stakeholders at all levels.

For each strategic objective, a non-exhaustive list of key players involved in implementation is provided. Institutional stakeholders on biodiversity in Belgium are presented in Annex 1.

The Belgian NBS is not only the Belgian response to the formal obligation of the CBD, but it is also a necessary tool to confirm priority and voluntary themes and objectives of and for Belgian policymakers. It is particularly useful to support the integration and development of regional and federal action plans. It pays particular attention to the need to integrate the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity into the various relevant sectors of society, including the social and economic sectors.

The updated strategy reflects the new priorities for action identified as those that will best contribute to the adopted EU Vision 2050 and EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030. It takes into account the new commitments to biodiversity made by Belgium at the international and European level and the results of international assessments such as the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES, 2019).

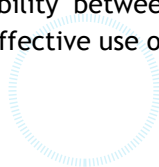
OBJECTIVE 1: IDENTIFY AND MONITOR BIODIVERSITY IN BELGIUM

In principle, the entire wealth of biodiversity should be the subject of protection or conservation measures. However, it is impossible to focus efforts on all elements of biodiversity. Given the complexity of biodiversity, there is no simple answer to how to illustrate the status, changes and trends in the components of biological diversity. The size and complexity of the Earth's web of life means that it is logistically and financially infeasible to exhaustively monitor every species, habitat and genetic element. Limited capacity and financial resources often limit the ability to monitor biodiversity. Moreover, many ecosystems and species are found in remote or inaccessible areas, making data collection difficult. It is therefore essential to establish effective monitoring strategies.

These biodiversity monitoring strategies allow for the prioritisation and focus of efforts on certain components of biodiversity, in particular (1) ecosystems and habitats that are unique, rare, at risk of extinction, or that play a critical role for priority species; (2) species that are rare, endangered, vulnerable, endemic or live in specific habitats; and (3) genomes and genes that are of particular social, scientific or economic importance; and (4) functional components of biodiversity that are essential for the provision of ecosystem services.

It is also important to monitor the state of biodiversity at the level of biogeographical regions and cooperate with neighbouring countries to harmonise monitoring and indicators where necessary.

Biodiversity monitoring is essential for monitoring ecological changes, maintaining vital ecosystem services and promoting sustainable practices, all of which are fundamental to the well-being of our natural world and our interconnected environment. Proper monitoring, accompanied by regular reporting on the status and trends of biodiversity components, enables adaptive management and enables policymakers to develop appropriate policy responses. To detect changes, systematic observations of biodiversity are collected using standard formats and methods. The collected observational data are often transferred to open databases. Ensuring interoperability between these databases will improve the effective use of biodiversity information.



Given the complex and dynamic nature of ecosystems and the uncertainties inherent in their management, adaptive management is a compelling approach. Biodiversity monitoring is also a prerequisite for informing the public and stakeholders about progress towards the 2030 biodiversity targets at EU and global levels. It also helps to increase public awareness and participation.

Ecosystems are dynamic and evolving entities, and as conditions change, the most effective strategies often emerge through a process of learning by doing and incorporating feedback from research. This underlines the importance of periodically reviewing biodiversity monitoring strategies.

Operational objectives

1.1 Develop and implement strategies for biodiversity monitoring

The responsibility for monitoring biodiversity in Belgium lies with both the regions and the federal government. Each region manages biodiversity monitoring according to its own criteria and priorities, resulting in different approaches to monitoring. The federal government is responsible for North Sea projects. In Flanders, the Institute for Nature and Forest Research (INBO) plays an important role in biodiversity monitoring. In Wallonia, the Département de l'Étude du milieu naturel et agricole (DEMNA) is responsible for biodiversity monitoring and the Département de la Nature et des Forêts (DNF) for its conservation, and for the Brussels-Capital Region it is the Brussels Institute for Environmental Management. Biodiversity monitoring requires a joint effort in terms of human expertise, financial support and ongoing research.

When developing and implementing strategies to monitor biodiversity, it is essential to consider lists of the most vulnerable species and ecosystems, including those designated under Natura 2000. In addition, existing Belgian regional red lists of threatened species can be a valuable resource. In the marine environment, the international framework of OSPAR has allowed the establishment of a list of priority species and habitats. It is also important to take into account the specific nature of Belgian ecosystems/species and to identify those elements of biodiversity that are rare, particularly threatened

with extinction, vulnerable or of special importance (for ecosystem functioning; of symbolic importance; of cultural significance) at the national level.

The development of a biodiversity monitoring strategy requires the adoption of biodiversity indicators. The choice and design of biodiversity monitoring indicators have a major impact on the policy, monitoring and research programmes that follow. Sometimes biodiversity indicators are proposed or adopted because they are easy to measure, because they are interesting or because related time-series data are available, although these data were collected for a different purpose. These indicators should be critically evaluated and, if inadequate, phased out and replaced by specially developed biodiversity indicators.

The concept of essential biodiversity variables (EBVs) was introduced to promote the collection, sharing and use of biodiversity information (Navarro *et al.* 2017) and provides a way to aggregate the many biodiversity observations collected by different methods, such as *in situ* monitoring or remote sensing.

There is no single method to assess, monitor and analyse the state and evolution of biodiversity. There are numerous indicators that complement each other, but each only gives a partial picture of the complex reality. Working closely with other NGOs and scientific institutes, WWF produced the Living Planet Report in 2020. This report evaluated the Living Planet Index (LPI) for Belgium and provides an essential tool to assess the evolution of biodiversity in the country. The promotion of such a collaborative initiative is crucial and should be

renewed as it provides a basic tool for political decision-makers to anchor their ambitions.

1.2 Align biodiversity monitoring strategies with European and international guidelines and strengthen cooperation between regions

There is an increasing need to prepare national reports on the state of biodiversity for international bodies and the European Commission. To avoid unnecessary duplication and minimise workload, it is essential that biodiversity monitoring bodies take into account existing monitoring efforts at EU level, such as the Habitats and Birds Directives, the Nature Restoration Regulation, the Soil Monitoring

and Resilience Directive, the EU Forestry Strategy Monitoring Plan, etc.

At the international level, the development of the K-M GBF monitoring framework (see box below) is also an important monitoring tool that should be reflected in Belgium's biodiversity monitoring strategies. The data collected and analysed should make it possible to effectively detect trends in the implementation of the K-M GBF.

Moreover, to maximise the effectiveness of monitoring efforts, regions should be able to align their indicators, especially when assessing the same biodiversity components. This will improve the consistency and comparability of data and facilitate aggregation and analysis at the national level. Moreover, coordinating sampling periods between regions can further streamline the process and ensure that the information collected is not only robust, but also contributes to a more holistic understanding of biodiversity trends in the country.

The stakeholders involved in the implementation of this objective are: the federal and regional governments, the sectors concerned (agriculture, fisheries, forestry), nature conservation agencies, research institutes, universities, nature conservation NGOs, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform and any association pursuing the same objective as the NBS .²¹

• CBD instrument

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Monitoring Framework, Annex I of Decision CBD/COP/DEC/15/5. The monitoring framework consists of the following groups of indicators for monitoring the implementation of the K-M GBF: (a) main indicators describing the overall scope of the goals and targets of the Kunming-Montreal global biodiversity framework, (b) global-level indicators compiled from binary yes/no responses in national reports, (c) component indicators, (d) additional indicators for thematic or in-depth analysis of each goal and target.

OBJECTIVE 2: STUDY, MONITOR AND ADDRESS KEY DIRECT DRIVERS OF BIODIVERSITY LOSS

The main processes that threaten biodiversity or have significant negative impacts on biodiversity are identified in Section I.4. It is imperative to study and monitor these processes, as well as to take appropriate measures to mitigate and/or stop their effects. Regular monitoring of their causes is necessary and underlines the need for proactive actions to reduce these threats.

The stakeholders involved in implementing this objective are: federal and regional governments, nature and environmental conservation agencies and research institutes, the Belgian Biodiversity Research Platform, universities, market players (including companies and importing sectors, consumers and other members of civil society), NGOs and any association pursuing the same objective as the NBS.

Operational objectives

2.1 Prevent land and sea use changes from having a negative impact on biodiversity, in particular by ensuring that all areas are subject to participatory and integrated spatial planning.

Our need for space, whether to produce food, work, generate energy, move around or live, competes with land and/or sea as a resource. This competing demand for land and marine resources has led to significant changes in natural habitats and ecological imbalances. To mitigate the negative impacts of these changes, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive spatial planning approach that prioritises biodiversity considerations. This spatial planning is based on the identification and assessment of current and future activities to ensure their sustainability while minimising negative impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Sector plans in Wallonia and the Spatial Policy Plan Flanders are spatial planning instruments that regulate land use. The development of these instruments can help ensure that land-use changes respect

²¹ Annex 1 provides a list of institutional biodiversity actors in Belgium.

biodiversity conservation objectives. Biodiversity should be considered not only in green areas, but as a cross-cutting element in all elements of the landscape.

This requires the active participation and cooperation of various stakeholders, including governments, conservation organisations, scientific experts and the business sector. Clear and legally binding rules should ensure that competent authorities do not authorise changes in land and sea use that would cause irreversible damage to priority biodiversity components.

2.2. End all overexploitation, illegal, unsustainable or unsafe acquisition of or trade in wild species and study and monitor the impact of overexploitation on biodiversity and ecosystem services

The use of wild species directly contributes to the daily well-being of billions of people, and around 50,000 wild species worldwide are used for food, energy, medicine, materials and other purposes through fishing, gathering, logging and harvesting of land animals (IPBES, 2022). To reverse global biodiversity decline, it is essential to address the causes of unsustainable use and promote and ensure the sustainable use of wild species.

Overexploitation has been identified as the main threat to wild species in marine ecosystems and the second for species in terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems. Unsustainable fishing is the main cause of the increase in the risk of extinction of sharks

and rays over the past 50 years. For terrestrial species, unsustainable logging, hunting, gathering and harvesting contribute significantly to the unsustainable use of trees, plants, mushrooms, wild birds, etc. Achieving this objective is closely linked to objective 4 of this strategy.

The global wildlife trade is one of the main drivers of increasing use. If not effectively regulated, such trade can become a driver of unsustainable use (IPBES, 2022). Belgium is also involved in the trade of wildlife species and animal products, amphibians and carvings based on hippopotamus ivory, which has a negative impact on global biodiversity. Therefore, it is important to control and regulate the harvesting, consumption and trade of wild species and. Moreover, Belgium has a role to play and a responsibility in allowing the export of native species to other countries and continents. There has also been an increase in trade in CITES-listed specimens of non-wild origin. This trade is also controlled and regulated by CITES. CITES is implemented through European regulations implemented in Belgium, which provide a basis for controlling trade in CITES-listed species. There are three pillars for the implementation of CITES in Belgium: the Belgian CITES Management Authority, the CITES Scientific Authority (responsible for all scientific advice) and the CITES Enforcement Authorities (responsible for all CITES-related controls).

EU legislative instruments help address the challenge of wildlife trade; the EU Timber Regulation and the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Regulation have been integrated and enhanced by the EU Deforestation Regulation. It aims to prevent timber products and a range of agricultural products that have been illegally produced and contributed to deforestation and forest degradation from entering the EU market and being exported from the EU, whether from the EU or elsewhere in the world, by introducing a due diligence system for operators and traders.

EU nature directives ban the sale and transport of a number of strictly protected wild species in the EU. Illegal logging and associated trade not only threaten biodiversity in timber-producing countries (through overexploitation, depletion of scarce natural resources, destruction of ecosystems, etc.), but also have serious economic and social consequences

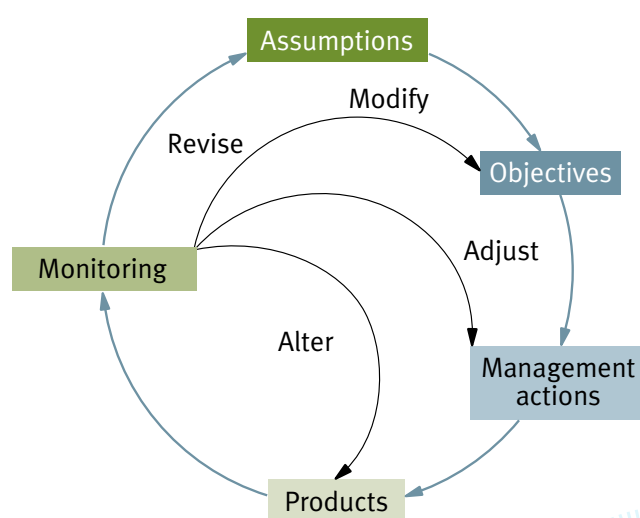


Figure 3. Feedback loop in adaptive management (UNEP, 2003)

(loss of revenue for local governments, corruption, impoverishment of rural communities dependent on forest products, etc.). With regard to CITES timber, Belgium and the EU have always had an interest in working closely with countries of origin to ensure that CITES permits are only issued when it has been clearly established that there is no harm and when the legality and sustainability of the tropical timber has been demonstrated. Where large quantities of CITES timber are confiscated and, where possible, subsequently sold publicly, the proceeds should be invested in local projects to improve the sustainable use of forests. Timber not covered by CITES should be subject to strict due diligence by operators under the EU regulation against deforestation and forest degradation and monitored by competent authorities.

In addition, as announced in the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, the European Commission adopted a revised action plan against wildlife trade in 2022. This five-year action plan focuses on four priorities: prevention, enforcement, strengthening global partnerships and strengthening the EU legal framework.

It is essential to apply and implement CITES and EU regulations at the national level by strengthening cooperation and knowledge sharing between all players in the enforcement chain (federal government, customs, environmental crime unit, federal police centres of expertise, prosecutors). In addition, a comprehensive inter-ministerial environmental conference is currently studying a national action plan to combat wildlife and wildlife meat trafficking. This plan is awaiting approval. Strengthening financial and human capacities, both at the national level and in cooperation with consumer, transit and source countries, would also be crucial for effective implementation.

2.3 Study, monitor and minimise the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification on biodiversity and ecosystem services, and avoid the negative impacts of climate mitigation and adaptation measures on biodiversity.

As we indicate in the first part, some of the effects of climate change on biodiversity are already evident. They are likely to continue to increase as a result of predicted temperature increases. Climate change poses a direct threat to biodiversity and

the provision of ecosystem services as it disrupts ecological relationships and unbalances ecosystem functioning; it increases the impact of invasive alien species, disrupts the life cycle of some species and causes the migration or disappearance of others. It can also affect specific ecosystem services such as water regulation, nutrient cycling and food production. Populations of northern species tend to migrate northwards or disappear altogether (e.g. plant species), having failed to adapt to climate change. Terrestrial ecosystems are mainly affected through plant phenology and the distribution of plant and animal species, with specialised species most at risk.

Even if society significantly reduces its greenhouse gas emissions in the coming decades, the climate system is likely to continue to change in the coming centuries. Therefore, we need to prepare for and adapt to the consequences of certain unavoidable climate changes while taking measures to mitigate their effects.

Excess atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂), produced by human activities, is absorbed to a significant extent by seawater, lowering the pH of the ocean. This phenomenon, known as ocean acidification, has serious consequences for marine life. As pH drops, it becomes harder for marine organisms such as corals, molluscs and certain species of plankton to build their shells and skeletons from calcium carbonate, weakening their shells and reducing their populations. Moreover, ocean acidification can disrupt entire marine food chains, affecting fish stocks and economies dependent on fish, shellfish and crustaceans. Addressing this problem is essential to preserve the health and biodiversity of our oceans. Belgium has a number of climate-related policies to support climate action, but there is no specific reference to reducing ocean acidification or taking action in this direction (C. Galdies *et al.*, 2020).

In 2010, Belgium adopted its national climate change adaptation strategy. The strategy has 3 objectives: (1) to improve the coherence between existing adaptation activities in Belgium (climate change impact assessment, climate change vulnerability and adaptation measures already implemented); (2) to improve communication at national, European and international levels; (3) to initiate a process to draft a national action plan.



The strategy outlines the expected impacts of climate change in Belgium in a number of domains, including biodiversity, and lists adaptation measures already taken in these domains and in two cross-cutting domains: research and international cooperation.

Strategy implementation led to the development of a national adaptation plan for the period 2017-2020. These national adaptation measures are designed to strengthen and complement already existing regional and federal efforts. A new national adaptation plan is expected by summer 2024. Besides the national adaptation efforts, where cooperation between the different regional governments and the federal level is centralised, each government also has its own set of adaptation measures. Biodiversity and nature-based solutions* are included in each of these respective plans. At the end of 2019, the final version of the “National Energy and Climate Plan” for the period 2021-2030 was submitted to the European Commission. In this plan, our country lays down the main objectives and measures for its energy and climate policy for the period 2021-2030. The Flemish Region approved its Climate Resilience Plan 2030 in October 2022.

At the European level, the European Commission adopted its new climate change adaptation strategy in February 2021. This strategy sets out a visionary roadmap for the EU to become a climate-resilient society by 2050, fully equipped to cope with the inevitable impacts of climate change. In addition, the Nature Restoration Act also aims to contribute to the EU's overall climate change mitigation and adaptation goals.

One-third of the global reduction in CO₂ emissions needed to limit global warming to 1.5°C can be achieved by protecting and restoring forests and other similar ecosystems. Restoring biodiversity (see target 3.3) offers significant potential to contribute to this objective. It is therefore crucial to maximise synergies between biodiversity restoration and climate policies. Operational target 3.4 plays a key role in adaptation measures.

Helping biodiversity adapt to climate change and enhancing the positive impacts of climate change mitigation measures are essential to increase biodiversity resilience. The use and integration of nature-based solutions is an effective way to address

multiple problems simultaneously (see operational objective 3.4). However, negative trade-offs can arise, for instance if measures to mitigate climate change by using land or ocean to absorb greenhouse gases result in a loss of biodiversity. For example, initiatives such as reforestation and Clean Development Mechanism projects, as provided for in the Kyoto Protocol under the UNFCCC, can have a significant impact on biodiversity. These initiatives should be designed to improve biodiversity or at least avoid negative impacts on biodiversity (e.g. by planting different species of native trees instead of monospecific plantations of exotic species). Carbon offset projects, such as reforestation, should meet specific sustainability criteria and, where applicable, respect the rights of indigenous peoples.

2.4 Investigate, monitor and reduce the impact of pollution from all sources to levels that do not harm biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, taking into account cumulative effects.

Pollution comes from various sources, including chemical emissions, pesticides, light and noise. Discharges of nutrients, chemical pesticides, pharmaceuticals, hazardous chemicals, urban and industrial wastewater and various types of waste, including rubbish and plastics, have harmful effects on biodiversity.

The Zero Pollution Action Plan was adopted by the European Commission in May 2021. The vision for 2050 is to achieve a state of zero pollution, where air, water and soil pollution are reduced to levels that are no longer harmful to human health and natural ecosystems. This vision aims to set pollution levels within the limits of what our planet can handle, ultimately creating a toxin-free environment. The plan also sets targets for 2030, such as reducing by 25% the number of ecosystems in the EU where air pollution threatens biodiversity, or reducing by 50% the amount of plastic waste in the sea and by 30% the amount of microplastics discharged into the environment. The action plan also focuses on waste generation.

Light pollution also has a significant impact on biodiversity by disrupting the rhythms and delicate behaviour of many species. Nocturnal animals such as birds, bats, insects and marine animals depend

on darkness for essential activities such as foraging, mating and navigating. However, excessive artificial light disrupts and disorients these organisms, leading to changing migration patterns, disrupted feeding habits and increased vulnerability to predators. Light pollution can also disrupt the reproductive cycles of several species, affecting reproductive success and population dynamics. To mitigate these effects, a light pollution action plan, with objectives such as reducing unnecessary light sources and incorporating up-to-date maps of darkness requirements into government departments' planning processes, could significantly accelerate the implementation of effective measures to protect nocturnal biodiversity. Linking the street lighting master plan to environmental and wildlife legislation is crucial to ensure consistency in protection efforts.

Noise pollution can have similar negative effects on flora and fauna. At EU level, the European Noise Directive (END) requires Member States to make noise maps and noise management action plans every five years. However, the directive does not set limit or target values for environmental noise.

The EU Soil Strategy 2030 outlines a framework and concrete measures to protect and restore soil and ensure its sustainable use. It sets out a vision and targets to achieve healthy soil by 2050, with concrete actions by 2030. One of the objectives of this EU strategy is to reduce soil contamination to levels that are no longer harmful to human health or ecosystems. The future directive on soil monitoring and resilience will support the implementation of the strategy and provide Member States with a common monitoring framework to better ensure soil health.

2.4.1 Reduce excess nutrients lost to the environment by at least half, in particular through more efficient nutrient cycling and nutrient use.

Nutrients are essential for life, but excess nutrients in the air, water and soil have major impacts on human health, climate and the environment. In Europe, excess nitrogen and phosphorus in the environment already exceed global safety limits (EEA/FOEN, 2020). Nutrient inputs come from various sources, including atmospheric deposition of nitrogen oxides from industrial combustion processes, transport, wastewater discharges and discharges

from aquaculture production. Imbalances in the nitrogen and phosphorus cycle are also caused by the application of mineral fertilisers and manure to agricultural land and by animal husbandry. The fact that not all nutrients used in agriculture are efficiently taken up by plants has reduced biodiversity in rivers, lakes, wetlands and seas.

In the EU, nutrient pollution has been addressed through a framework of several environmental laws - the Urban Wastewater Treatment and Nitrates Directives, complemented by the Water Framework Directive, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the National Emission Reduction Obligations Directive, the Industrial Emissions Directive and standards for emissions from the transport and energy sectors.

The European Commission is currently developing an action plan for integrated nutrient management. This action plan will include key elements such as more sustainable use of nutrients, boosting the market for recovered nutrients, addressing nutrient pollution at source and making livestock farming more sustainable.

The difference in excess nutrient production between Wallonia and Flanders stems from different agricultural practices. In Flanders, much livestock farming is carried out in intensive off-ground systems, which generally leads to significant nutrient accumulation. In Wallonia, farms tend to use techniques adapted to local spreading capacity. These differences in farming methods contribute to different nutrient surpluses in the two regions. With the "Programmatic Approach to Nitrogen" (PAS) and a renewed manure action plan MAP7, the Flemish government will take steps to significantly reduce nitrogen emissions and restore nature by 2030. In Wallonia, the EU Nitrates Directive is being implemented through the "Programme de gestion durable de l'azote et de l'agriculture". Many water bodies in our country are not yet in the good condition required by the European Water Framework Directive by 2027. Our water systems are polluted by emissions from agricultural activities (fertilisation), households (wastewater) and companies (industrial discharges). Belgium therefore urgently needs to reduce its nitrogen emissions and nitrogen inputs.

The European "Farm to Fork" strategy also addresses the issue of excess nutrients under Objective 2.1 "Ensure sustainable food production". The European

Commission will aim to reduce nutrient losses by at least 50% while ensuring that soil fertility does not decline. This will make it possible to reduce fertiliser use by at least 20% by 2030. Fertilisation techniques and sustainable farming practices, such as the Sustainable Farming Tool for nutrient management, should be included in Member States' CAP strategic plans.

2.4.2 Reduce the overall risk of pesticides and highly hazardous chemicals by at least half, especially through integrated pest management, based on scientific evidence and taking into account food security and livelihoods.

Pesticides are products used to prevent, eradicate or control pests or diseases and to protect plants or plant products during production, storage and transport. Pesticides have a harmful effect on biodiversity.

Nevertheless, it is possible to reduce the impact of pesticides and the risks they pose to biodiversity, human health and ecosystem services by reducing their impact on non-target organisms. A series of recommended measures, if properly applied, can help achieve this goal; (1) adopting agro-ecological practices and integrated pest management to reduce pesticide use, mechanical weed control, banning pesticides scientifically proven to have long-term impacts on non-target species abundance and diversity (2) reducing pesticide losses when applied with precision agriculture, precise application of use and maintenance instructions, low spray beam positioning and (3) reducing pesticide dispersal by containing residue losses through well-designed buffer zones. These have to do with the choice of pesticide or how it is dispersed in the environment. Organic farming, integrated farming and biological control are examples of solutions.

The 2023-2027 programme of the National Action Plan to Reduce Pesticides (NAPAN) was drawn up on the basis of the EU directive that provides a framework for community action to achieve sustainable use of pesticides. NAPAN aims to reduce the risks and use of pesticides and their impact on the environment and public health through actions developed by federal and regional governments. This operational objective is aligned with a target of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, which requires a 50% reduction in the risks and use of chemical pesticides and a 50%

reduction in the use of more hazardous pesticides. To achieve this objective, an EU regulation on the sustainable use of plant protection products has been under negotiation since 2022. The implementation of this objective will take into account the results of the negotiations. However, a calculation of the impact of existing and planned measures in Belgium in this area is recommended. Moreover, a thorough evaluation is needed to determine whether these efforts are sufficient to achieve this objective.

To achieve this operational objective, strong support must be given to farmers, who are at the forefront of making changes and transitioning away from dependence on pesticides. Providing them with the necessary resources, incentives and training will enable them to explore and implement viable alternatives to pesticides. In addition, substantial investment in research and development, along with dedicated budget allocation, are essential to encourage innovation and adoption of effective alternatives.

The Belgian Royal Decree of 19 November 2023 bans the export of hazardous substances, such as pesticides, biocides and industrial chemicals, which are banned or strictly regulated in Europe, to non-EU countries. This measure will stop the export of these substances to countries less equipped to manage the associated risks, and will contribute to Objective 4a.

2.4.3 Reduce, prevent and eliminate plastic pollution.

The exponential growth of plastic production and consumption in recent decades has had serious negative impacts on the environment and human health. Plastic pollution has a significant impact on natural habitats and wildlife. The most visible effects of plastic waste are the swallowing, choking and entanglement of hundreds of marine animals (IUCN, 2021).

At EU level, a number of specific policy measures have been taken to reduce plastic pollution. The European single-use plastics directive aims to prevent and reduce the impact of certain plastic products on the environment, in particular the marine environment, and on human health. EU rules on packaging and packaging waste cover both packaging design and

packaging waste management. In addition, the EU is working to combat the growing amount of microplastics in the environment.

A new international instrument to combat plastic pollution is currently being negotiated at global level. United Nations member states have begun drafting the text of the convention, which will lead to a legally binding global agreement on plastic pollution in the near future. The new instrument is expected to tackle plastic pollution by addressing the entire life cycle of plastic, to reduce mismanagement of plastic and prevent plastic from entering the environment.

At the Belgian level, the three regions have already started implementing some of these European policies, although more remains to be done. The federal government has implemented the European directive on single-use plastics. The Belgian regions should adopt a specific strategy to combat plastic pollution, combining awareness, regulation, innovation and international cooperation.

2.5 Study, monitor and minimise the impact of invasive alien species on biodiversity and ecosystem services

Biological invasions are one of the main causes of species extinction in the world (and in Belgium) after the loss of natural habitats. Organisms can be intentionally or unintentionally introduced by humans outside their natural range. These include viruses, bacteria, fungi, algae, mosses, ferns, flowering plants, invertebrates and vertebrates. Not all exotic species are harmful, but Invasive Alien Species (IAS) can cause significant damage to nature and the economy. Many invasive alien species also promote the emergence and spread of infectious diseases, posing a threat to humans and animals.

IAS have a negative impact on native species and can have a profoundly negative effect on ecosystem functioning. On the economic front, they can negatively affect crop yields and clog waterways, among other things. In terms of public and animal health, they can cause serious problems because they can transmit parasites and diseases or produce allergens and toxins. They often entail significant management costs to limit their development, mitigate their damage or restore ecosystems. According to

the Summary for Decision-Makers of the Thematic Assessment of Invasive Alien Species and Their Control (IPBES, 2023), preventing the introduction of invasive alien species is the most cost-effective management option. Coordinated strategies and action plans at the national level are essential to successfully manage biological invasions as part of a context-specific integrated governance approach.

At EU level, the Invasive Alien Species Regulation comprises a set of measures to be taken across the EU. The core of the regulation is the “Union list” or list of invasive alien species of Union interest. This is a dynamic list that is regularly updated and reviewed at least every six years. Species on this list are subject to restrictions and Member States must :

- act on pathways of unintended release (i.e. prevention).
- take measures for early detection and rapid eradication of these species.
- manage species that are already widespread in their area.

A cooperation agreement was drawn up in 2019 between the Federal State, Communities and Regions on for the prevention and control of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species in Belgium. This agreement ensures a coordinated implementation of the EU regulation on invasive alien species and facilitates the crucial exchange of information between the parties involved. As a result, three new national bodies dealing with invasive alien species were established: the National Scientific Secretariat, the National Scientific Council and the National Committee.

The Belgian action plan on priority pathways for the unintentional introduction and spread of EU-listed invasive alien species in Belgium was adopted in 2022 and aims to combat the unintentional introduction and spread of invasive alien species. The plan, prepared by the National Scientific Secretariat on IAS in cooperation with the competent authorities, meets the requirements of Article 13(2) of the EU IAS Regulation. It contains three thematic action plans: (1) on the introduction and spread of IAS through keeping for private or public purposes, (2) on the introduction and spread of IAS through recreational and professional activities in freshwater

environments, and (3) on the introduction and spread of IAS through transportation of habitat materials, culture substrate and machinery.

Additional efforts and financial and human resources will be needed to combat biological invasions in Belgium and to achieve the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 target of “managing established invasive alien species and reducing by 50% the number of red-listed species threatened by them” and the K-M GBF to “reduce by at least 50% the rate of introduction and establishment of other known or potential invasive alien species by 2030”. To achieve this, the EU IAS regulation must be fully implemented and the EU list must be continuously updated with IAS of particular importance to the European Union. The Thematic Assessment of IAS and its Control, adopted at the 10th Plenary Session of IPBES (2023), is an important source of recommendations for improving strategies to address IAS challenges.

In recent years, a considerable amount of work and awareness-raising initiatives for different target groups have been undertaken in Belgium at different levels of government (e.g. workshop for policy-makers, training for inspectors, production of identification brochures and videos, national surveys and citizen awareness campaigns).

The threat posed by IAS is directly addressed by operational objective 2.5, but also by operational objective 2.2, which deals with internal and external trade.

TARGET 3: PROTECT, PRESERVE AND RESTORE BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES IN BELGIUM TO A FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION STATUS

Healthy ecosystems are necessary if we are to halt biodiversity loss and benefit from the many valuable services they provide. Despite the initiatives already in place, habitats in Belgium are increasingly fragmented and degraded. This situation has a direct and indirect impact on biodiversity, as it makes ecosystems vulnerable to other threats, such as biological invasions. It also undermines the many services that healthy ecosystems provide to society, such as clean water and protection against flooding and erosion.

At the global level, Parties to the CBD agreed to make a concerted effort to protect and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services by adopting a set of targets and objectives: K-M GBF Objective A, Target 2 (30% of degraded terrestrial, inland, coastal and marine ecosystems are effectively restored), Target 3 (30% of terrestrial, coastal and marine areas are effectively conserved and managed), Target 4 (take urgent management action to halt human-induced extinctions of known threatened species).

As part of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, there are a number of targets that significantly support this objective: protecting 30% of the EU's terrestrial and marine areas, strictly protecting at least one-third of protected areas in the EU, effectively managing all protected areas and ensuring that trends and conservation status of habitats and species do not deteriorate. In addition, the Nature Restoration Regulation, a key component of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, entered into force on 18 August 2024. It combines an overall restoration target for the long-term restoration of nature in EU terrestrial and marine areas with binding restoration targets for specific habitats and species. The regulation establishes a framework within which Member States “shall implement effective and area-based restoration measures with the aim of collectively restoring, as a Union objective, at least 20% of terrestrial areas and at least 20% of marine areas by 2030 in all areas and ecosystems falling within the scope of this regulation, and restoring all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050.” (Art. 2 of the Nature Restoration Ordinance)

The implementation of the EU Soil Strategy 2030 is an important step towards achieving this objective. Soil hosts more than 25% of the Earth's biodiversity (FAO, 2020) and forms the basis of the food chains that feed humanity. Moreover, healthy soil is a powerful carbon sink, making it a vital ally in climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Nature conservation activities throughout Belgium, especially in marine areas and in rural and urbanised areas, should be reinforced by optimal protection, management and restoration measures. Moreover, since climate change and biodiversity are closely linked (see *Chapter 1.4*), climate change adaptation should be integrated into all nature management plans. The protection and conservation of ecosystems

should include a diagnosis of their vulnerability and prospects in light of climate change, as well as action plans to strengthen ecosystem resilience. Just as we insist that climate change mitigation measures do not harm biodiversity (cf. *operational objective 2.3*), it is equally crucial to support biodiversity adaptation to climate change.

- **Draft favourable conservation objective (EU Habitats and Birds Directives)**

The conservation status of a natural habitat is 'favourable' if (i) its natural range and the areas it covers within that range remain stable or increase, and (ii) the specific structure and functions necessary for its long-term conservation exist and will continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and the conservation status of the habitat's typical species is favourable as described below.

The conservation status of a species is 'favourable' if (i) the data on the population dynamics of the species indicate that it can sustain itself in the long term as a viable component of its natural habitats, (ii) the natural range of the species is not diminishing and will not do so in the foreseeable future, and (iii) there is sufficient habitat to maintain the population in the long term and that it is likely to do so in the future

- **Concept good state (Nature Restoration Act)**

"Good condition": In relation to a site of a habitat type, a condition in which the essential characteristics of the habitat type, in particular its structure, function or typical species composition, reflect the high level of ecological integrity, stability and resilience necessary to ensure its long-term conservation and thus contribute to achieving or maintaining a favourable conservation status for a habitat, when the habitat type concerned is listed in Annex I to Directive 92/43/EEC, and, in marine ecosystems, contribute to achieving or maintaining good ecological status.

- **Concept of environmental status (Marine Strategy Framework Directive)**

"Good environmental status" refers to the environmental status of marine waters when they provide ecologically diverse and dynamic oceans and seas that are clean, healthy and productive in their intrinsic conditions, and where the use of the marine environment is at a sustainable level, safeguarding the potential for uses and activities for current and future generations.

Operational objectives

3.1 Contribute to the target of conserving at least 30 per cent of areas on land and inland waterways, particularly areas of high importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, and strictly protecting 10 per cent of these. Ensure conservation by developing effectively and fairly managed, ecologically representative and well-connected protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and by integrating these areas into wider landscapes.

This target appears both in the K-M GBF, where it is an overall target, and in the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030. Belgium will contribute to the respective targets related to protected areas and will also use the process known as "the pledge", at the invitation of the European Commission.

In this commitment, each EU member state indicates how it will contribute to the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, which aims to protect at least 30% of the EU's land and 30% of its seas for nature by 2030. At least a third of these areas (10% of land and 10% of sea) must be strictly protected. Member States will also outline how they will ensure that by 2030 there is no further deterioration in the trends and conservation status of habitats and species protected by EU nature directives.

In addition, member states should ensure that by 2030, at least 30 per cent of species and habitats that currently do not have a favourable status reach this category or show a strong positive trend.

The aim of this operational objective is to strengthen the existing terrestrial networks of protected areas and other effective conservation measures in the three regions and promote interconnection between them and with neighbouring countries.²²

The target is based on the concept of *ecological networks** and will include the ecological requirements of priority components of biodiversity to ensure that they are maintained or restored to a favourable conservation status. As small landscape elements play a key role in connectivity between networks, their conservation and/or restoration will be encouraged.

There are many different types of protected areas in Belgium, characterised by different levels of protection, but all established with the common aim of conserving and protecting biodiversity. The Natura 2000 network currently covers 12.7% of Belgian territory, with an ecologically representative system of protected areas. The importance of strictly protected areas lies in their ability to act as vital refuges for wildlife and ecosystems, allowing them to thrive undisturbed thanks to their full protection from all human activities. Wetlands are another essential component of Belgian ecosystems. They provide valuable ecosystem services such as water retention and purification, recreational areas, habitats for wild birds, etc. Nine wetland sites are listed under the Ramsar Convention in Belgium. Moreover, certain environmental associations play an active role in the creation and management of nature reserves, thus enhancing biodiversity conservation.

Besides this network, other areas are protected or designated as protected areas by other conservation measures, such as certain agri-environmental measures and sustainable forest management measures.

An important dimension of this objective is the need for effective and equitable management. After all, without the implementation of management measures, protected areas remain paper parks. One way to make an important contribution to achieving this objective is to strengthen the effective implementation of EU directives (the Habitats and Birds Directives), the Nature Restoration Act and international conventions (the Ramsar Convention).

In addressing this objective, it is essential to consider its implementation in the context of operational objective 2.1 (spatial planning). For a large number of wild species, crop species and varieties and breeds of domestic animals, establishing a system of protected areas is not sufficient. Consequently, establishing buffer zones, which play a transitional role, can be an important asset.

3.2 Contribute to the conservation target that at least 30 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of high importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, and 10 per cent of these are strictly protected. Ensure conservation through the development of effectively and fairly managed, ecologically representative and well-connected protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and by integrating these areas into wider landscapes.

This target appears both in the K-M GBF, where it is an overall target, and in the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030. Belgium will contribute to the respective targets related to protected areas and will also use the process known as “the pledge” at the invitation of the European Commission.

The Belgian part of the North Sea, which is both a fragile ecosystem and one of the most heavily used marine areas in the world, is under great pressure from maritime activities (fishing, coastal defence, sand and gravel extraction, shipping, oil and gas extraction, offshore energy, tourism) and land-based activities (agriculture, urbanisation, ports, industry).

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are an important way to preserve the rich diversity of life in the oceans. They are considered one of the best ways to store carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and improve coastal ecosystems. They can support local economies by providing a refuge from fishing pressure on commercial fish stocks. If properly located and managed, MPAs can act as a refugium and reduce fishing mortality and bycatch. Strictly protected areas in coastal and marine environments can serve many purposes, such as natural laboratories for scientists to study undisturbed ecosystems, or they can help maintain ecosystem resilience.

²² The concept “terrestrial” includes inland waters.

To ensure the development of a coherent and representative network of MPAs, it is essential that the areas are designated in a spatial plan. The MPAs in the Belgian part of the North Sea are defined in the Marine Spatial Plan (MRP) 2020-2026. The first Belgian plan was drawn up in 2014, the same year the EU adopted the Marine Spatial Planning Directive. This directive requires all member states with marine waters to draw up and implement such a plan. Moreover, drawing up an MRP contributes to achieving the objectives of the European Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), and in particular its operational objectives 2.1 and 3.2. The “good environmental status” targeted by this directive has not yet been achieved in the Belgian part of the North Sea. To achieve this desired status, the competent authority must, on the one hand, limit the impact of human activities and projects by correctly applying the procedures for environmental permits and Natura 2000 authorisations and imposing mitigating and compensatory measures and, on the other hand, work on nature protection and restoration projects with concrete action plans, deadlines and budgets

Ecologically important areas designated as Natura 2000 sites currently represent 38% of Belgium's marine area, which is already more than the target. However, efforts are still needed to achieve a favourable conservation status for the habitats and species for which these areas were designated. To restore biodiversity in the North Sea, it is essential to reduce and phase out activities that have a negative impact, such as sand extraction and fishing. This is especially crucial for the three marine reserves that will be established by the new MRP and will cover about 6.4% of the Belgian North Sea.

3.3 Maintain or enhance the integrity, connectivity and resilience of all ecosystems and contribute to the target of effectively restoring at least 30% of degraded terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystem areas by 2030.

Designating and creating protected areas will not be enough to restore biodiversity, achieve a favourable conservation status across the country and maintain the provision of ecosystem services. Many areas are already degraded to varying degrees and need to be restored. Care must be taken to ensure that the principle of restoration does not become

an argument to justify the degradation of ecosystems that are still in good condition. The aim of this objective is to reverse the loss of ecosystems and not to increase the area, which could lead to further degradation despite the positive figures.

This target is in line with target 2 of the K-M GBF and with certain targets of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, including reversing the decline of pollinators, planting three billion additional trees in the EU in full compliance with ecological principles and restoring at least 25,000 km of free-flowing rivers.

A vision for nature restoration has been drawn up for the North Sea in which 3 priority efforts will be made to restore 3 habitats: gravel beds, oyster beds and the enhancement of other biogenic reefs such as aggregations of shell tube worms. The objectives of the plan are to (1) reduce pressure on the system; (2) increase knowledge about the system and possible restoration measures; (3) implement restoration measures; and (4) raise awareness among stakeholders and the general public.

The Nature Restoration Regulation also contains a set of specific targets relating to pollinating insects, forest, urban, agricultural and marine ecosystems and river connectivity. This regulation establishes a framework within which Member States must implement effective, area-based restoration measures, with the aim of collectively covering at least 20% of terrestrial areas and at least 20% of marine areas by 2030. Member states must submit draft national recovery plans to the European Commission within two years of the regulation entering into force showing how they will achieve the targets set. The plan will set out a trajectory up to 2050 to gradually restore all habitats (terrestrial and marine) to favourable conservation status and ensure that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of habitats not currently in favourable conservation status fall into this category, and that habitat trends and conservation status do not deteriorate further. The plan will also aim to achieve the favourable habitat baseline, ensuring connectivity and enabling the deployment of nature-based solutions as a default solution in the fight against the climate and biodiversity crisis. Restoration measures will also be taken for the habitats of species protected under the Birds and Habitats Directives. This plan will be prepared transparently, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including civil

society, and will determine the financial instruments to be used for its implementation. Member States must also monitor and report on their progress. The implementation of this European legislation, together with the European soil strategy at national level, will substantially contribute to achieving this objective.

Soil degradation impairs its ability to provide essential ecosystem services, such as water retention and carbon absorption, which are vital for climate regulation and ecosystem protection. Restoring soil health is therefore critical to ensure ecosystem resilience in the face of climate change and to sustainably support biodiversity.

3.4 Promote and prioritise nature-based solutions.

Nature-based solutions, as defined in the UNEA resolution “Nature-based solutions for sustainable development” (UNEP/EA.5/Res.5) and referred to in the EU Council conclusions of 24 October 2022, are actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems that efficiently and adaptively address social, economic and environmental challenges while ensuring human well-being, ecosystem services, resilience and biodiversity benefits.

They are based on the idea that when ecosystems are healthy and well managed, they provide essential benefits and services to people, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, making water resources available, improving air quality or increasing food security. Forests, which host 80% of the Earth's biodiversity, are one of the best examples of nature-based solutions. They offer many benefits, such as clean air and water, preventing erosion and landslides, and play a crucial role in regulating the climate by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

3.5 Significantly increase the area, quality, connectivity, accessibility and benefits of green and blue spaces in urban and densely populated areas and improve native biodiversity, ecological connectivity and integrity.

Belgium is a densely populated and urbanised country, resulting in a fragmentation of green and blue spaces.

Containment during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for green spaces in urban areas. Parks, trees and water not only act as buffers against heat, air pollution and noise, but are also essential for the physical and mental health of residents (EEA, 2019).

This operational target is aligned with target 12 of the K-M GBF, Article 8 of the Nature Restoration Regulation and the target of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, which requires that cities with at least 20,000 inhabitants have an ambitious urban greening plan. This operational target aims to give a new direction to spatial planning in our cities. As far as possible, urban greening plans should be designed in consultation between authorities and citizens, as blue-green spaces can also fulfil educational, teaching and recreational functions. Promoting the creation of parks, gardens, urban agriculture and green corridors will actively soften and reshape the ‘grey’ infrastructure of Belgian cities.

Under the Nature Restoration Regulation, the aim is to achieve a situation of no net loss of urban biodiversity by 2030, with an increase to a satisfactory level. The satisfactory level must be determined by 2030 through a transparent and scientific process. The law defines ‘urban areas’ in Article 3 (urban centres and urban clusters).

The 3-30-300 rule is a green city planning guideline that proposes three criteria: 3 trees should be visible to each resident from their home, 30% tree canopy in each neighbourhood and each resident should be within 300 metres of a green space.

However, access to green spaces in urban areas is often unequal. More affluent neighbourhoods often benefit from more green spaces, while less affluent neighbourhoods are often deprived of them. Addressing this inequality requires specific measures aimed at improving equitable access to green spaces in all parts of cities and initiating coordinated action at the municipal level.

Sufficient resources should be made available to the public sector, while at the same time NGO and private sector projects should be encouraged and supported with regulatory and financial resources. For example, for building green roofs and urban gardens, planting hedges and local trees, combating exotic species, improving biodiversity in gardens and

business parks (e.g. by abandoning mowed lawns and avoiding pesticides), increasing the permeability of private car parks (infiltration premium). To achieve this goal, it is important that public and private initiatives complement and reinforce each other.

Besides creating additional green and blue spaces in cities, sustainable management that respects the biodiversity of these areas is essential. This ranges from selecting plant species to monitoring trees and avoiding unnecessary felling. Particular attention should be paid to projects whose sole purpose is to develop green spaces in urban areas to mitigate the effects of global warming. Indeed, the project may lead to the creation of structures that do not increase biodiversity but increase management costs or may also increase the risk of biological invasions (Eggermont *et al.*, 2015). Sustainable management that respects biodiversity requires a whole range of actions that require coordination and cooperation between local, regional and federal authorities.

The Belgian Biodiversity Alliance, a national initiative supported by the relevant regional and federal ministers and launched in 2022, is a concrete example of the joining of forces between the public and private sectors. One of the targets of the Alliance is that 120,000 hectares of urban and peri-urban areas will have a net positive impact on biodiversity by 2030.

3.6 Enhance biodiversity conservation and restoration in production systems

This operational objective is closely related to operational objective 3.3, but focuses on production systems that have a variable impact on ecosystems and biodiversity. The diversity and variability of animals, plants and micro-organisms used in these systems is an important aspect of biodiversity. Reversing the decline in biodiversity that has already occurred in these production systems is the first step towards their sustainable use (see Objective 4).

Already mentioned in operational objective 3.3, the European Nature Restoration Regulation, once implemented at national level, will be a powerful tool to achieve this objective. This law will require member states to increase forest biodiversity and trend for six out of seven indicators, such as forest connectivity, abundance of common forest birds, organic carbon stock and standing and dead wood

on the ground. The law sets specific targets for agricultural areas. These include an increase in two of the following three indicators: grassland butterflies, organic carbon stock in mineral soils on agricultural land and the proportion of agricultural land with landscape elements with high diversity. The law also provides for an increase in the number of birds commonly found in agricultural environments and the restoration of peatlands drained for agricultural purposes.

This target is also in line with a target in the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, which calls for at least 10% of agricultural land to be covered by landscape elements with high diversity. This can be achieved through practices such as planting hedgerows, agro-forestry integrating trees into crops, restoring extensive permanent grassland or creating grass strips, ponds and fallow flowers to attract pollinators. Creating artificial ponds and wetlands and dry-stone walls would also help enrich biodiversity.

3.7 Reduce to zero the loss of areas of high biodiversity importance, including ecosystems with high ecological integrity.

Areas of high biodiversity importance are regions that are home to a variety of plant and animal species, including endangered or endemic species, and play a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance. Ecosystems with high ecological integrity play a crucial role in maintaining biodiversity, as many species depend on habitats in good condition, with intact species communities, to withstand increasing threats at both local and global levels. To achieve this goal, the first step is to identify these areas of high biodiversity importance including ecosystems with high ecological integrity in Belgium, delineate their boundaries and understand their unique ecological characteristics.

However, achieving this objective does not depend on this identification process alone. It requires coordinated efforts (e.g. implementation of policies and instruments, budget) to prevent the degradation of these areas of high biodiversity importance. Achieving this objective is not autonomous, but depends largely on the ability to achieve other objectives of this strategy (cf. operational objectives 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3).



The principle of compensation is included in the 10 guiding principles inherent in the implementation of the NBS (see Part III). Compensation for damaged habitats is a legal requirement of the European Birds and Habitats Directives in case of damage to Natura 2000 sites. For habitats and ecosystem services not covered by Natura 2000, the EU has developed the “no net loss” concept²³. This concept requires all development projects that may have an impact on biodiversity to follow a strict mitigation hierarchy, prioritising, firstly, measures to avoid or prevent negative impacts; secondly, where impacts cannot be avoided, to minimise damage and repair their effects; and thirdly, to compensate or repair remaining negative impacts.

3.8 Halt the human-induced extinction of endangered species, ensure their conservation or recovery to a favourable conservation status and reduce the extinction rate and extinction risk of all species by a factor of ten

On our territory, 132 species are protected by European legislation (“Habitats” and “Birds” Directives), 3 of which are unique to Belgium. Most of the species protected by European legislation belong to the group of birds. This objective is in line with international commitments (Objective A, Objective 4 of the K-M GBF). Monitoring and implementing a management plan for endangered species, including those not listed in the European directive, is essential to ensure their protection

This operational objective is also highly dependent on the achievement of the other objectives of this NBS. Protection (see operational objectives 3.1 & 3.2) and restoration (see operational objective 3.3) of habitats and ecosystems will significantly increase the chances of achieving the objective. Species recovery is best achieved by expanding habitat that resembles their habitat in terms of plant, animal composition, microbial communities, ecosystem function and stability. Moreover, many species require different types of habitats during their life cycle (reproduction, growth, shelter, etc.), highlighting the need to create ecological corridors.

3.9 Maintain and restore genetic diversity with-

in populations of native, wild and domesticated species and secure their adaptive potential

Genetic erosion poses a major threat to species and hampers their ability to adapt to environmental changes. In a world where climate change and crises are increasingly common, it is crucial to maintain species resilience. Maintaining the genetic diversity of native wild species and their abundance at a resilient level should be a priority. Changes in their environment can promote the establishment of non-native species, to the detriment of native species.

To preserve genetic diversity, it is necessary to use complementary strategies such as creating nature reserves, eliminating harmful stressors and restoring habitats. *Ex situ* conservation, which serves as a repository of biological information for *in situ* conservation, is a method used to preserve and protect existing genetic diversity within populations. Belgium is home to huge *ex situ* collections of endangered varieties, breeds and species from both within the country and around the world.

The development of an integrated strategy for genetic biodiversity conservation will provide a framework to further harmonise existing *ex situ* conservation initiatives, identify gaps where new initiatives are needed and promote the mobilisation of necessary resources. In particular, research and management capacities for *ex situ* conservation infrastructures should be strengthened.

To address this threat of genetic erosion, it is important to understand how certain economic activities (agriculture, fisheries, forestry) can impact genetic diversity, and then implement effective restoration measures.

3.9.1 Promote the sustainable use of genetic resources for food and agriculture

The dominant form of agriculture, based on industrial and intensive production, tends to alter the biodiversity of soil microbial organisms (M. Tsiafouli *et al.* 2015). Biological and genetic diversity in agriculture is essential for the sustainable development of agricultural production and rural areas. Indeed, genetically non-diversified agricultural areas are more threatened by environmental stress and disasters; moreover, genetically diverse foods provide a

²³ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_14_645

greater variety of nutrients useful for good overall health and resistance to disease.

Coordinated actions should be taken at the Belgian level (including regional level) to improve the strategy for conservation of genetic diversity, which is essential for food and agriculture. The conservation of genetic diversity in agriculture should be achieved through *in situ* conservation of species, varieties, domestic varieties and local microbial life forms of real or potential value. Measures should also be taken to improve the development of appropriate gene banks useful for *ex situ* conservation of genetic resources for food and agriculture. Such conservation requires an adequate system of economic and social incentives, combined with increased consumer awareness.

A specific agricultural biodiversity management strategy should be developed in collaboration with the sectors concerned to coordinate the various actions already underway and promote new ones.

3.9.2 Promoting the protection of forest genetic diversity

Scientific evidence suggests that high levels of genetic diversity are a guarantee of perennial forests. Biodiversity in forests is therefore important not only for its economic potential, but also because genetic variation within species affects growth and resistance to stresses such as exceptional climatic conditions, diseases and epidemics.

For the reasons cited above, Belgium needs to protect its forest genetic resources to ensure healthy tree populations and preserve the full potential of forests. This requires a better understanding of conservation of forest genetic resources, along with the adoption of practical conservation measures and stopping monospecific forests. In orchards in general, it is recommended to redouble efforts to protect the known growth areas of natural populations of native trees on the one hand and increase incentives to produce sufficient seed in well-managed seed orchards on the other. The “Technical Guidelines for the Conservation and Use of Genetic Resources” of the EUFORGEN network can serve as a basis for this work in Belgium.

3.9.3 Avoid GMOs having a negative impact on biodiversity and populations

The use of genetically modified organisms and their release into the environment are highly controversial issues. The impact of genetically modified organisms must be carefully assessed before their release to avoid possible negative impacts on biodiversity and in particular on the genetic diversity of wild and protected species.

GMO research should include a thorough assessment of scientific uncertainties and social impacts, applying the precautionary principle to ensure the protection of human health and the environment. In addition, it is crucial to carry out appropriate risk analysis and clearly identify the institutions responsible for these analyses. Finally, responsibility for GMO risks should be regulated by law to ensure transparency and accountability of stakeholders.

3.10 Manage interactions between humans and wild species effectively to minimise conflicts between the two.

Everywhere, humans and animals share territories. The COVID-19 pandemic once again demonstrated the magnitude of the potential consequences of human-wildlife interactions. Conflicts between humans and wildlife arise when the needs and behaviour of wildlife adversely affect humans, or when humans adversely affect the needs of wildlife.

Zoonoses, infectious diseases that can be transmitted from wild animals to humans, are closely linked to human-wildlife interactions. Raising awareness and introducing appropriate regulations are crucial to prevent epidemics and protect both human health and biodiversity.

In Belgium, the wild boar is often involved in coexistence issues between humans and animals. While the wild boar can have a positive impact on ecological services such as seed dispersal, recreational hunting opportunities and food resources, there are also negative impacts. These include crop damage, disease transmission, damage to private and public property, human health and safety risks from road accidents. Agreement on management measures for this species between the stakeholders involved (conservationists, hunters and farmers) has not always proved easy but significant progress has been made in promoting cooperation and mutual understanding between stakeholders in the

hunting sector. To resolve human-wildlife conflicts, it is necessary to understand the reasons for this disagreement (e.g. the assumed effectiveness of measures, different perceptions of the value of flora and fauna) (Geeraerts, C. *et al.*, 2021).

Since 2018, the wolf population has re-established itself on our territory. These large predators play an important role in our ecosystems, for instance in forest regeneration and regulation of meso-predators. There are reports of wolves killing different species of livestock or domestic animals, which has led to conflicts with the farming community, among others. Many people feel that these animals do not belong in Belgium, which has led to a public debate on wolves in Belgium. In Flanders, the INBO drew up a wolf management plan to provide a framework for human-wolf coexistence, including financial and technical support for wolf protection fences. Wallonia has also had a management plan since 2020 that provides for protection measures, awareness campaigns and compensation options. Coexistence with wild animals can lead to fewer conflicts if society is well prepared. It is essential to raise public awareness of the possible return of other large predators, such as the golden jackal and the lynx, to our territory.

To promote coexistence, it is also important to continue working on preventive measures, stakeholder support, capacity building, consultation, monitoring and research (development of a knowledge centre). Research should also be encouraged on how species returns can help address challenges, such as the role of beavers in the transition to climate-resilient water management.

Ecosystem conservation and restoration projects must take into account human-wildlife interactions. Mosquitoes, for example, have always been part of the ecology of wetland environments and are an important part of the food web that supports this community. Failure to integrate mosquito management into conservation can unintentionally upset this balance and potentially lead to human-wildlife conflict. Recognising the interconnectedness of species within an ecosystem is essential to the success of conservation initiatives and underscores the need for holistic approaches that consider both the health of the environment and the well-being of the human communities that share these spaces with wildlife.

TARGET 4: ENSURE THE SUSTAINABLE USE OF BIODIVERSITY COMPONENTS AND THE FULL INTEGRATION OF BIODIVERSITY AND ITS MANY VALUES IN ALL SECTORS, PARTICULARLY AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY, FISHERIES, AQUACULTURE, FINANCE, TOURISM, HEALTH, MANUFACTURING, INFRASTRUCTURE, ENERGY AND MINING

Sustainable use of biodiversity refers to “the use of components of biological diversity in a manner and at a rate that does not lead to long-term degradation of biological diversity, while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and desires of present and future generations” (CBD, Article 2). This concept is based on the premise that it is possible to use biodiversity in such a way that ecological processes and the variability of species and genes remain above the thresholds necessary for long-term viability, and that all resource managers and operators therefore have a responsibility to ensure that such use does not exceed these capacities.

Unsustainable activities that have a negative impact on biodiversity should be identified and solutions developed to minimise this impact. Synergies must be created between economic growth, social progress and long-term ecological balance, with quality of life at its core. Fair and thoughtful management of our natural resources will be a key element in the sustainable use of our biodiversity. It is essential to ensure that ecosystems can continue to provide the ecological services on which both biodiversity and humans depend.

Operational objectives

4.a) Wild species

4a.1 Ensure that management and use of wild species are sustainable

The IPBES Thematic Assessment on the Sustainable Use of Wildlife (2022) recognises that wildlife use is widespread and occurs in almost all aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, and supports global economies, including for food, medicine, sanitation, energy and many other uses. Fisheries, wildlife harvesting, forestry and ecotourism are vital for employment and regional and local economies in many developed

and developing countries. They contribute to public infrastructure, development and the production of goods and services.

This objective is in line with objective 9 of the K-M GBF. Indeed, overexploitation can be identified as the main threat to wild species, as is the case for marine ecosystems (IPBES, 2022). Moreover, if not effectively regulated, global trade can become a driver of unsustainable use.

Education, public awareness, best practice recommendations and communication are key elements in strengthening sustainable use, as they help to improve decision-making and knowledge. In addition, it is important that policy instruments and tools to promote the sustainable use of wild species are adapted to the local ecological and social context.

4.b) Agriculture

The importance of agriculture for the natural environment and biodiversity is underlined by the fact that almost half of Belgium's land area is cultivated. Agriculture is an activity that goes beyond simple food production and affects and uses natural resources such as soil and water. Over the centuries, agriculture has contributed to the creation and preservation of a wide variety of agricultural landscapes (fields, meadows, hedgerows, forests, etc.) that are important semi-natural habitats for wildlife. The agricultural sector also plays a multifunctional role as a food producer, biodiversity manager, economic driver in rural areas and guarantor of *in situ* conservation of local species, varieties and domestic breeds. In recent decades, however, the intensification and specialisation of agriculture has led to significant loss of biodiversity on and around farmland. In particular, populations of birds commonly found on agricultural land have declined sharply in recent decades.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) initially aimed to improve productivity and ensure food security in post-war Western Europe. By providing subsidies and guaranteed prices to farmers, the CAP encouraged higher production and ensured stable incomes for farming communities. Financial support was also provided to encourage farm restructuring and modernisation to help farmers adapt to the economic and social climate of the time. However, these efforts unintentionally led to the reduction of agricultural

land of high nature value, the removal of hedgerows and the drainage of wetlands. These intensification practices, such as the use of large amounts of fertilisers and chemical inputs, increased mowing frequency, grazing pressure, early mowing and enlargement of agricultural plots, have put pressure on ecosystems in various ways.

The CAP has undergone a number of reforms since 1992, with increasing emphasis on taking biodiversity interests into account. These reforms recognise the importance of preserving and enhancing the environment alongside agricultural production. One example is the implementation of agricultural environmental programmes, which offer financial incentives to farmers who adopt environmentally friendly practices, such as switching to organic farming or preserving habitats for endangered species. In addition, the wider agricultural sector has gradually realised the importance of stemming biodiversity loss and has started to take measures to protect and enhance the environment.

4b.1 Ensure agricultural areas are managed sustainably and significantly increase the area managed under biodiversity-friendly practices

The current CAP reform "CAP 2023-27" contains a number of policy reforms to support the transition to sustainable agriculture in the EU. Under the new strategic plan for the CAP, EU member states must demonstrate that they are more ambitious on environmental and climate measures than in the previous programming period. CAP beneficiaries must now link their payments to a more stringent set of mandatory requirements.

Farmers can choose to support the environment and biodiversity by making annual or multi-annual commitments. These commitments cover a wide range of activities, such as maintaining perennial grassland, establishing flower strips, mechanical weed control, maintaining small landscape elements such as hedgerows, or switching to and maintaining organic farming. In addition, at least 25% of the direct payments budget will be allocated to eco-schemes, which provide strong incentives for climate- and environment-friendly farming practices such as organic farming, agroecology, carbon farming and improved animal welfare. In addition, 40% of the CAP budget will be specifically designated as climate-related, in line with the broader commitment to allocate 10% of

the EU budget to biodiversity targets by the end of the period of the EU multiannual financial framework.

Article 11 of the Nature Restoration Regulation requires EU member states to adopt restoration measures to enhance biodiversity in agricultural ecosystems, taking into account climate change, the social and economic needs of rural areas and the need to ensure sustainable agricultural production.

To strengthen the resilience of production systems, ensure food security and preserve biodiversity, it is necessary for farmers and horticulturists to adopt biodiversity-friendly practices, such as sustainable soil management, agro-ecological approaches, buffer strips, mechanical weed control and the planting and maintenance of hedgerows. This operational target is in line with international commitments (target 10 of the K-M GBF) and with certain targets of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030. It aims to encourage governments and farmers to implement the measures of the CAP reform 2023-27. The Flemish agricultural policy aims to have 5% of agricultural land farmed organically by 2026. Currently, only 1.7% of land is used for organic farming, underlining the need to accelerate efforts to reach this goal.

4b.2 Enhance and encourage farmers' role as biodiversity stakeholders

The role of farmers as actors in biodiversity protection should be encouraged. Farmers play a key role in agricultural ecosystems to protect and enhance the environment, biodiversity, natural resources, soil and genetic diversity (e.g. crop rotation, organic farming and set-aside of small plots) and to maintain the landscape and countryside (e.g. maintenance of open areas, management of linear and small landscape elements, ecological compensation areas*). In several regions, conservation of semi-natural habitats depends solely on the continuation of appropriate agricultural activities. It is necessary for the system to provide better support to farmers who meet environmental standards, and for the costs associated with certification not to hinder the adoption of practices that benefit society as a whole.

This operational objective complements the previous one by focusing on providing clear detailed advice on exactly how farmers should implement agri-environmental measures. This can be achieved, for example,

through guidelines that provide an easy and understandable way to convey information, as the wording of the CAP reform is quite complex. Appropriate in-service training and the dissemination of information to farmers, contract workers, agricultural advisers and teachers in agricultural schools are essential. Guides, workshops, conferences, publications and information campaigns could cover, for example, the following topics: best practices in soil management, the effect of pesticides on wildlife, the creation of fallow land* and its proper management for wildlife conservation, combating soil erosion or landscape improvement, the importance of preserving excellent native trees on farmland and other small landscape features, the protection of breeding and nesting wildlife in meadows and fields, the protection of ponds and rivers from manure pollution, etc. It is therefore important to support farmers in implementing sustainable practices, particularly by ensuring that measures are taken to prevent loss of income.

4b.3 Promote agricultural diversification and agro-ecological practices

Promoting agricultural diversification and agroecological practices to foster sustainable farming systems. Agroecology is a holistic and integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agricultural and food systems. It seeks to optimise the interactions between plants, animals, people and the environment while addressing the need for socially equitable food systems in which people can choose what, how and where to eat (FAO).

Agricultural diversification can be defined as all income-generating activities that farmers carry out outside their main agricultural activities, e.g. outside production areas. These activities must use the farm's resources (such as land, buildings or machinery) or products. This operational objective aims to promote agricultural diversification that is particularly beneficial for biodiversity and to support creative research into new diversification opportunities that can boost the conservation of local biodiversity, including traditional varieties. The system of advisory councils can provide advice to farmers interested in diversification

Agricultural diversification can meet demand for a variety of quality products and rural recreational

activities, while stimulating public interest in conservation. It can lead to an increase in the added value of a product and the profitability of farms, and improve the image of agriculture. Creative solutions can also address health constraints of local production, promote consumers' interests and ensure market access for these products.

Examples of such diversification activities in rural areas include (i) support for the management of nature reserves, (ii) the development of farm and nature tourism that increases public interest in biodiversity conservation, (iii) organic production of fruits and vegetables or organically reared chickens, (iv) local production such as farm cheese, old fruits and vegetables, snails, and (v) other initiatives that reduce the standardisation of agricultural production.

4b.3bis Supporting a transition to alternative and sustainable proteins

If we want to reduce our ecological footprint, we need to move away from animal proteins to a more sustainable agricultural and food system. Indeed, current animal protein production has a significant environmental impact, both nationally and in the countries that produce animal feed for our market). In addition, consumer and retail demand for local, sustainable, plant-based protein alternatives continues to grow, creating economic and social opportunities in our region. Therefore, it would be good if the strategies and actions for protein transition in our country are developed and supported, and fully integrated into the CAP's strategic plans.

The Flemish Protein Strategy 2021-2030 aims to promote a more sustainable food system in Flanders, focusing on the transition to alternative and sustainable proteins. The strategy encourages a reduction in the consumption of meat and animal products, and the promotion of a more balanced diet with more plant-based proteins, insects, algae and lab-grown proteins. The strategy also includes objectives for encouraging innovation and research, supporting farmers and raising consumer awareness.

4b.4 Promote integration of biodiversity in rural development

Agricultural and environmental policies should send complementary signals to farmers to ensure that

environmentally friendly agricultural practices are adequately implemented. The European Commission has presented a long-term vision for the EU's rural areas until 2040, identifying areas for action to create stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas and communities.

It also proposed a rural pact to mobilise governments and stakeholders to address the needs and aspirations of rural residents, as well as a rural action plan built around flagship initiatives. One of the main objectives of this action plan is to enhance environmental, climatic and social resilience.

4b.5 Ensure that plant production as a source of renewable energy and for the bioeconomy does not have a negative impact on biodiversity.

In recent decades, the use of biofuels and biomass in the transport sector has been widely promoted. Analyses show that European biodiesel has had a major impact on the global vegetable oil market. To meet the growing demand for biomass and biofuels, the EU already imports large quantities of crops with high environmental impact, such as palm oil and sugar cane. Crops such as wheat and maize, which are also widely produced in Europe, are used to meet this demand. This should not lead to unacceptable pressure on biodiversity and food production in exporting countries. This is not only a problem for biofuels.

The use of biofuels and biomass²⁴ is an alternative to fossil fuels and is being promoted as part of efforts to combat climate change. However, an analysis of the full life cycle and associated land-use changes shows that their environmental impact is not necessarily beneficial. Indeed, land-use change is one of the major concerns related to the impact of first-generation (and to a lesser extent second-generation) biofuels. Increased demand from the EU has an impact on land use in both EU and non-EU countries. The use of biomass residues does not require additional land, but the disposal of forest residues can lead to significant loss of forest biodiversity. Establishing a robust certification and verification

²⁴ In the NBS, the terminology refers to any material derived from biomass (plants, algae, animals or fungi) that is used for energy production. Biomass plays an important role as a feedstock for renewable energy production (electricity, heating and cooling or transport fuels), but also as a raw material for other applications.

framework for advanced biofuels would increase confidence in this energy source.

The EU Renewable Energy Directive, which aims to promote the sustainable use of energy from renewable sources, has been revised and will become legally binding in June 2021. It sets the overall European renewable energy target at 32% and includes rules to ensure the use of renewable energy in the transport and heating and cooling sectors, as well as common principles and rules for renewable energy support schemes, rights to produce and consume renewable energy and establish renewable energy communities, and sustainability criteria for biomass. Given the need to strengthen our energy independence from fossil fuels, a provisional agreement was reached in 2023; a binding target of at least 42.5% was set for 2030, but with a goal of reaching 45%.

The development of the bioeconomy is widely supported by the EU, notably through research and the updating of the Bioeconomy Strategy. According to the European Commission, the bioeconomy is the use of renewable biological resources from land and sea, such as crops, forests, fish, animals and micro-organisms, to produce food, materials and energy. The transition to a biomass-based economy requires a significant increase in biomass quantities. To be successful, the European bioeconomy must therefore focus on sustainability and circularity.

4. c) Fishing in marine and inland waters

Belgium has a limited coastline and the country's professional sea fishing fleet is relatively small. By 2024, Belgium's fishing fleet comprises 55 vessels. The Belgian fleet is working towards sustainability by committing to sustainable fishing and using the "sustainable fishing" label. Belgian fishing activities consist mainly of beam trawling for sole and plaice²⁵. In 2022, 13,217 tonnes of fish were sold in Belgian ports and shrimp landings reached a record level of 855 tonnes. As the state of commercially exploitable fish stocks is assessed at the European level and not at the level of each member state, marine biodiversity is mainly threatened in our coastal zone, where direct and indirect disturbances are concentrated. Two major threats are the overexploitation of marine

resources and the harmful effects of certain fishing methods (especially fishing methods that impact the seabed) used not only by Belgian fisheries but also by foreign fishing boats operating in Belgian waters. Belgian fisheries are making significant investments to integrate the impact of bottom fishing on the seabed, taking into account the sensitivity of habitat types and associated flora and fauna. Despite the creation of several international instruments to regulate fishing and its impact on the environment, the pressure on the marine ecosystem and fish populations remains. Besides professional fishermen, recreational fishermen are also active at sea.

Fisheries and aquaculture in the North Sea are governed by the EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), adopted in 1983 and revised in 1992, 2002 and 2013. The latest revision of the CFP aimed to achieve environmentally sustainable fisheries and aquaculture (see Article 1 of the CFP) and maximum sustainable yield by 2020. The CFP takes into account the biological, economic and social dimensions of fisheries. The CFP covers four main areas, namely (1) the conservation of fish stocks (such as setting total allowable catches (TACs) of marine fish that can be safely caught each year to allow for the renewal of fish stocks), (2) structures (such as vessels, port facilities and fish processing plants), (3) the common organisation of markets and (4) an external fisheries policy that includes fisheries agreements with non-Community countries and negotiations within international organisations.

In 2023, the European Commission presented a new package of measures to improve the sustainability and resilience of the EU fisheries and aquaculture sector. The package consists of an action plan for the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems and a communication on energy transition in the fisheries and aquaculture sector. The action plan includes phasing out mobile bottom fishing in marine protected areas (MPAs) by 2030, increasing selectivity, protecting sensitive species, supporting the fishing sector during the transition by maximising the use of available resources, strengthening the knowledge base, research and innovation, improving implementation, monitoring and enforcement of legislation, improving governance, stakeholder engagement and education. This action plan contributes to the achievement of the EU's Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and its commitment to

²⁵ Source: <https://statbel.fgov.be/en/news/belgian-sea-fishing-recovers-2022-increase-landings-and-prices>

legally and effectively protect 30% of our seas, with a third to be strictly protected. At national level, Flanders has exclusive competence over sea fishing and is responsible for translating European policy and implementing fisheries policy.

The Belgian North Sea is currently managed under the Marine Spatial Plan (MSP) 2020-2026 (introduced under operational objective 3.2). As fishing is a European competence, no direct measures can be taken under the plan to limit fishing activities. However, the Marine Environment Department is working on establishing three management zones to protect the integrity of the seabed, where fishing activities that disturb the seabed will be prohibited. The proposed areas are within the three survey zones included in the current MSP. Currently there is an ongoing procedure under Art. 11 of the CFP to reach a Joint Recommendation on the proposed fisheries restriction measures. The EC must then incorporate this Joint Recommendation into a Delegated Act so that the proposed measures become applicable to all fishing vessels operating in the Belgian part of the North Sea.

In Belgium, inland fishing can be considered a recreational activity or a sport. It is mainly practised for recreation and, to a lesser extent, for food, in artificial areas specially developed for fishing (private ponds, fishing grounds) and in the public water system of rivers and canals. Current Belgian legislation covers only the management of the public water system. Various improvements in the management of still waters by fishermen should be encouraged, both to ensure the ecological management of aquatic ecosystems and to improve the quality of local fish populations.

At EU level, the Water Framework Directive requires EU member states to achieve good status* for all surface and groundwater bodies by 2027. Good status is determined by assessing the ecological status and chemical status of surface and groundwater. In Belgium, this directive is implemented at regional level, with the introduction of regional management, except for the coastal zone, which falls under federal jurisdiction. Nevertheless, more needs to be done to achieve good ecological status.

4c.1 Ensure fisheries and aquaculture areas are managed sustainably and significantly improve biodiversity-friendly practices

Overfishing is one of the biggest problems of the European Union's common fisheries policy. Overfishing is not only an ecological problem, but also an economic problem for the fishing industry. The problem of overfishing cannot be tackled at the level of the Belgian part of the North Sea alone. Belgian fisheries are in balance with their fishing opportunities. Most important stocks are managed at maximum sustainable yield levels and are considered to be in fairly good condition.

An important aspect of sustainable fisheries is significantly reducing species bycatch to levels that allow species recovery and conservation. By-catches are unintentional catches of non-target species. As the main fishing activities in Belgium consist of demersal fisheries targeting sole and plaice, improving selectivity and reducing by-catches are important objectives. Current fishing gear and practices are being significantly improved to minimise these impacts. In the North Sea, incidental catches in beam trawling mainly concern shark and ray species. Most of these species are protected, live long lives and reproduce slowly. Continuous fishing activities also have an impact on the seabed. In the past, oyster beds, which harboured rich and unique biodiversity, were a precious food source for many other species. However, fishing now prevents these oyster beds from recovering.

The Belgian aquaculture sector is relatively small. In the Belgian part of the North Sea, aquaculture is allowed, under certain conditions, in the two renewable energy zones and in the commercial and industrial zones, all defined by the MSP. The environmental permit for an aquaculture farm is granted on condition that aquaculture reduces the eutrophication of seawater in these zones.

4c.2 Ensure that recreational and sport fisheries at sea and in inland waters meet ecological management objectives to avoid negative impacts on biodiversity.

The impact of recreational sea fishing on fish stocks was first assessed in 2022 with a rolling multi-year data set (2017-2021). The report recognised the importance of collecting data on recreational fishing as it can identify changes or declines in fish populations before they are reflected in overall North Sea figures, thus acting as an early warning system.



Regardless of the location, inland fisheries should respect ecosystem quality by avoiding unnecessary, ineffective or harmful poisoning (overcrowding, ponds connected to other water bodies, etc.) and by avoiding the introduction of fish into the ecosystem. Where appropriate, the introduction of native fish should respect local genetic strains and population structure. Populations of species of no fisheries interest should be respected. The introduction of alien species should be avoided to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive alien species. Excessive baiting and consequent eutrophication should also be avoided, especially in lakes and reservoirs. Moreover, monitoring of these activities should be strengthened.

Planning and restoration of inland water systems should be encouraged: through biomanipulation*, fisheries can help restore clear water systems with macrophytes and high species richness instead of poor and banal turbid water systems characterised by algal blooms. In addition, maintenance and construction of fish-free ponds should be encouraged for specific biota, such as amphibians.

4. d) Forestry

The forestry sector plays a multifunctional role as a producer of renewable natural resources, provider of income and employment, manager of biodiversity, guarantor of *in situ* conservation of local tree species and provider of environmental services (such as soil and water protection) and recreational activities.

Biodiversity in Belgian forests is locally threatened by intensive management, pollution, changes in groundwater levels, fragmentation, recreational activities and high densities of big game (ungulates), exotic fallow deer and muntjac. Indirectly, the forest is also threatened in its function as a productive resource. To ensure that biodiversity is preserved in Belgian forests, it is necessary to work on both quantitative and qualitative aspects, focusing on 'internal measures' within forest and nature conservation policies and practices, as well as on measures outside the forest sector (e.g. environmental quality, spatial planning).

Biodiversity in forests contributes to the balance and resilience of ecosystems. Forests host a wide variety of plant and animal species, many of which are essential food sources for humans and animals. Forests

provide a multitude of ecosystem services such as filtering water, regulating climate, preventing soil erosion, etc. Natural forestry practices ensure that forests are resilient in the face of climate change. One of the basic principles of this approach is to favour natural regeneration over planting. The aim is to create a working forest that is stable, resilient and productive while providing habitat for common species. To encourage biodiversity in forests, it is essential to take actions such as leaving dead wood and creating lightly mown edges. This forestry approach tries to mimic natural processes and limit human intervention.

Building on the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, the new EU Forestry Strategy 2030 sets out a vision and concrete actions to improve and strengthen the protection, restoration and resilience of EU forests.

4d.1 Ensure that all forests are managed sustainably using appropriate close-to-nature forestry practices.

To address the problem of overexploitation, sustainable forest management practices were implemented in Belgium. As described earlier, the concept of "forestry practices closer to nature", based on ecosystem dynamics, encompasses existing approaches to increase biodiversity in sustainably managed forests.

Forestry close to nature is a flexible system that makes it possible to preserve and enhance the natural characteristics of forests through proper planning, harvesting methods, sourcing of plant material and management practices that take ecological requirements into account. It enhances the ecological function of forests. Its promotion should be based on a better understanding of the economic benefits (e.g. through innovative research) and a better illustration of the biodiversity benefits (e.g. through demonstration areas). Public forests in Belgium are gradually adopting a forest management close to nature, which is also encouraged for private forest owners. In Flanders, associations (Bosgroepen) offer various services to help small forest owners manage their forests.

Positive incentives are available to promote sustainable forest management. In Flanders, financial incentives are available for forest management, including

afforestation. In Wallonia, public and private owners must meet sustainable forest management (SFM) criteria to receive financial incentives for forestry activities. The results of regional forest inventories show that forests are becoming more diverse and that biodiversity-related parameters, such as the amount of dead wood, are evolving positively. However, further efforts are needed to ensure that forests are adequately protected to ensure their long-term health and biodiversity.

4d.2 Promote Forest biodiversity conservation through independent and credible forest certification systems as a guarantee of sustainable forest management

Forest certification is considered one of the most important initiatives of the last decade to promote sustainable forest management, and certification has been underway in Belgium since 1994. Several certification schemes exist worldwide; the best-known initiatives are the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes (PEFC). The Brussels Capital Region actively promotes the use of FSC-certified wood in public works, while PEFC is mainly promoted by the Walloon Region, where it is fully operational. The federal government and the Flemish Region support all certification systems that certify that wood comes from sustainably managed forests, for example through their public procurement policies.

This operational objective supports the use of “sustainable” and “responsible” timber products in commercial forestry (certified), as well as the promotion of credible certification systems. This objective can be achieved, for example, through actions in different areas, such as public procurement policy or awareness-raising activities for the public and forest owners. Forest certification can be an important tool for promoting better forest management and trade in forest products, although it is important to pay attention to the credibility of such certification. To be credible, systems must have robust and independent verification systems.

4.e) Hunting

Hunting is a leisure activity for about 23,000 hunters in Belgium. Belgian hunting was regulated by an 1882

law, but now falls entirely under the competence of the regions, with different rules in Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels Capital Region.

These laws vary from region to region to better suit the respective hunting situations²⁶. The 1882 law was first revised by the regions in the 1990s to achieve sustainable use of wild species and their habitats. In the Brussels Capital Region, hunting has been completely banned since 1991. Since the 1990s, amendments to Walloon and Flemish hunting laws and hunters' efforts have promoted the sustainable use of wild species and their habitats. To adapt this practice to today's challenges, it is therefore crucial to promote practices that respect the multifunctional nature of forests, practices that do not contribute to increasing big game populations, as is the case with artificial feeding, which has a major impact on biodiversity and causes a lot of damage in forests and on agricultural plains.

In Flanders, the management plans of the game management units are checked every six years and, if necessary, amended by the responsible minister. In Flanders and Wallonia, hunting plans are generally drawn up each year, usually by the game management units for certain large game species (red deer in Wallonia and roe deer in Flanders) and approved by the regions to ensure coordinated management of these game species. Since 1978, there has been a compulsory hunting exam in both Flanders and Wallonia to ensure best safety practices, ethics and good knowledge of game species and their habitats.

For birds, Council Directive 79/409/EEC establishes the general framework for the management of bird hunting in the EU. *The Guide to hunting in application of Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds*, published by the European Commission in 2004, accepts hunting activities in line with the general objectives of the Birds Directive. The AEWA Action Plan and the Bern Convention provide for the phasing out of the use of lead shot for hunting to prevent lead poisoning. The use of lead shot in wetlands has been banned since 1993 in Flanders and

²⁶ Flanders: Decree of the Flemish Parliament on hunting 24 July 1991; Wallonia: Law of 1882 amended by the Decree of 14 July 1994; Brussels: Order of 29 August 1991 on wildlife conservation and hunting.

since 2006 in Wallonia²⁷. Since 2008, the use of lead shot has been banned throughout Flanders.²⁸

Historically, hunters have played a role in habitat conservation. More recently, through their involvement in wildlife management units, hunters have taken management actions that have a positive impact on biodiversity, such as managing field edges, promoting ecological farming practices, planting native shrubs and trees and infrastructural actions. Legislation has allowed better regulation and control of hunting to reduce unauthorised practices (release of game, hunting of protected species). Hunting should not be the first solution to conflicts between humans and wildlife. It is essential to encourage behavioural change in terms of prevention, to reserve suitable areas for wildlife and to finance conservation measures (see Goal 3.10).

4e.1 Promote an integrated biodiversity management plan for hunting grounds, in coordination with farmers, foresters, ecologists, environmental NGOs, and promote the adoption of good hunting practices.

This operational objective is closely linked to operational objective 3.10 (human-wildlife interaction). Wildlife habitats are best managed in an integrated manner, including in collaboration with government agencies, recreationists, farmers, foresters, other land users and environmental NGOs. For example, care can be taken to create and maintain small game refuges, especially in agricultural biotopes. Hunters should be involved in restoring semi-natural habitats and conserving small open landscape features, in cooperation with farmers and landowners, key protagonists in landscape management. To achieve this objective, competent authorities can take legislative initiatives, such as strict management plans and appropriate sanctions, including zero tolerance for illegal shooting of protected species, to ensure compliance.

4e.2 Promote hunters' participation as biodiversity stakeholders

Hunting can have an impact on the long-term viability of populations, especially when combined with other pressures such as habitat reduction, pollution, etc. For this reason, sustainable hunting should be widely encouraged. Several practices can be improved to reduce pressures on biodiversity²⁹. Breeding and introduction of native and non-native small game species should be strictly controlled and avoided to reduce genetic pollution. In Flanders, the introduction of wild birds has been banned since 2001, but illegal introductions remain a problem. Excessive feeding of game should be avoided. Regarding predator control, hunters should strictly comply with legislation, as predators play an essential role in the natural control of populations.

The issue of exotic species detrimental to native biodiversity can partly be addressed in cooperation with hunters, as they can help contain populations of certain species or even be responsible for their systematic elimination.

Certain hunters make a positive contribution to biodiversity by conserving and restoring habitats for game species, such as hedgerows, forest and field edges, game crops, ponds and wetlands.

4.f) Other sectors

While agriculture, fisheries and forestry are recognised as the economic sectors with the greatest impact on biodiversity loss, it is necessary to recognise that other sectors also contribute to this global challenge.

4f.1 Promote sustainable tourism, finance, manufacturing, infrastructure, energy and mining and avoid their negative impact on biodiversity

At EU level, several processes have been put in place over the years for the tourism sector to reduce its ecological footprint: the introduction of the European eco-label and EMAS (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme), the promotion of sustainable and intelligent mobility through a strategy and action plans, encouraging the tourism sector to contribute to the objectives of the EU biodiversity strategy, as tourism depends on healthy ecosystems and their

²⁷ Decree of the Walloon Government of 22 September 2005 regulating the use of firearms and their ammunition for hunting, as well as certain hunting procedures or techniques.

²⁸ Decree of the Flemish Government of 19 September 2003

²⁹ The introduction of small game is prohibited in the Flemish Region.

rich resources (e.g. ecotourism has close links to protected areas, such as Natura 2000 sites on land and in the sea).

With the new Sustainable Finance Strategy of 6 July 2021, the EU has made significant progress on the regulation of sustainable finance over the past two years. The EU taxonomy is a cornerstone of the EU framework for sustainable finance and an important tool for market transparency. It allows investments to be targeted at the economic activities most needed for transition, in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal. In November 2023, a delegated act establishing technical selection criteria for substantial contribution to the environmental objective “protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems” was adopted. In addition, the Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR) and the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) have established a disclosure and reporting system for financial institutions and companies, respectively, that will ensure greater transparency on the impacts of these actors on the environment, as well as the (financial) risks arising from environmental degradation for these actors. Further progress can be expected in the area of sustainable finance and biodiversity, with the Task Force on Nature-Related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) having recently adopted its first set of recommendations.

Mining has increased dramatically due to the demand for mineral resources, mainly from industries such as construction, transport and defence, but also from other sectors such as energy production, information and communication technology and agri-food. European legislation on critical raw materials aims to promote more sustainable exploitation by setting clear standards and targets for the extraction and recycling of these essential materials. By including sustainability requirements in mining practices, the regulation encourages the use of less polluting technologies, the protection of ecosystems and the minimisation of social impacts. The regulation sets requirements for the sustainable sourcing of critical raw materials, whether locally produced or imported. It came into force on 23 May 2024 and must be properly transposed at the national level.

Deep-sea mining raises major questions because of its potential impact on marine biodiversity and

fragile ecosystems. Mineral resources on the seabed, such as polymetallic nodules, hydrothermal sulphides and cobalt crusts, are increasingly attracting the attention of extractive industries. In this context, regulation of mining activities is essential, given the gaps in regulation and scientific uncertainties about the long-term effects of exploitation. Belgium favours a rigorous approach and advocates in-depth research to better understand these unique ecosystems and strict regulation, including environmental targets, accompanied by full impact assessments prior to any authorisation. Moreover, Belgium strongly supports the goal of protecting 30% of the oceans, a priority that must be achieved before even considering the development of deep-sea mining activities.

To address this issue holistically, it is essential to integrate biodiversity considerations across all sectors (see Goal 5). In line with Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recommendations, each sector should undergo a thorough assessment of its current practices, commonly known as the “business as usual” approach. This assessment process should be combined with in-depth research on best practices based on national and international experience. Policies should then be implemented to promote sustainability, taking into account the specific social and economic context of each sector.

Effective communication and awareness-raising on the importance of biodiversity conservation are an integral part of this process and promote stakeholder engagement at all levels. In addition, technology and innovation offer significant opportunities to move these sectors towards sustainability. By using cutting-edge developments, negative impacts on biodiversity can be reduced.

4f.2 Ensure that the links between biodiversity and health are widely recognised, valued and reflected in national public health and biodiversity strategies and further integrate the One Health approach

Biodiversity and human health, and corresponding policies and activities, are linked in a number of ways. First, human health depends on the products



and services provided by ecosystems³⁰. Ecosystems are essential for good human health and productive livelihoods, such as purifying water and air, providing food and medicine, controlling pests and diseases, supporting medical research, etc. Many species provide invaluable information for human medicine. When we lose species, we lose the anatomical, physiological and behavioural information they contain. Plants and microbes have long been an important basis for the development of drugs such as quinine, morphine, penicillin, etc. and still are today. A second type of interaction stems from the impact of health sector interventions on biodiversity and biodiversity-related interventions on human health. For example, the use of pharmaceuticals can lead to the release of active ingredients into the environment and damage species and ecosystems, which can have a negative impact on human health.

The “One Health” integrated and unifying approach, as defined in Section 1.2, mobilises multiple sectors, disciplines and communities at different levels of society to work together to promote wellbeing and address threats to health and ecosystems, while meeting the collective need for clean water, energy and air, safe and nutritious food, combating climate change and contributing to sustainable development.

The “One Health” perspective provides a better understanding of the complex dynamics of disease emergence, transmission and prevention. It enables us to recognise the interdependencies between human and animal populations, ecosystems and environmental factors, facilitating a more global and effective response to pandemics and other global health threats.

To put this approach into practice, it is recommended to establish a cross-sectoral national One Health governance system to support proactive preventive measures against zoonotic outbreaks, establish a cross-sectoral national action plan, promote harmonised surveillance programmes through cross-sectoral collaboration, and support scientific research through funding opportunities, in order to promote zoonosis prevention and coordination of multidisciplinary projects. To bring about long-term behavioural change in society, it would also be useful to develop

a socio-educational programme linked to the prevention of the emergence of zoonoses.

This operational objective aims to ensure that all relevant political processes address sustainability issues in an integrated manner at health and environment, within the framework of sustainable development goals.

4.f3 Promote best practices on biodiversity in the construction sector

With the continued expansion of urban areas and the associated risks to natural ecosystems, this objective seeks to strike a balance between urban development and biodiversity conservation. This operational objective is linked to operational objective 3.5 of this strategy.

Before starting a construction project in urban areas, developers should be required to carry out a biodiversity impact assessment. This will assess the potential impact of the project on local biodiversity and look for ways to mitigate these impacts. Before starting a construction project in urban areas, developers must carry out a biodiversity impact assessment. This assesses the potential impact of the project on local biodiversity and looks for ways to mitigate these impacts. In the long term, planning regulations can be reviewed and strengthened to promote construction work with minimal impact on biodiversity and the environment. Nature should be integrated into the construction process, not only by including green elements in buildings, but also by creating habitats conducive to a diversity of plants and animals, such as bats, birds and bees, and by avoiding threats to biodiversity (e.g. see-through windows, windbreaks made of transparent glass, etc.). There are a number of ways to achieve this, including installing nesting boxes and tiles for bats, shelters for hedgehogs, nesting stones and tiles for birds and specially designed stones for insects and bees. These features give nature a sustainable, integrated place in buildings that can withstand climate change.

The development of indicators such as the coefficient of biodiversity potential per surface area (CBS+) can be useful for renovations and new buildings. This indicator represents a simple and useful value that assesses the ecological potential of a plot. Indeed,

³⁰ Source: Connecting Global Priorities: Biodiversity and Human Health Summary of the State of Knowledge Review, World Health Organisation and Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2015.

each plot offers different opportunities to encourage biodiversity development. The GRO tool, a tool to determine the sustainable and circular ambition level of a project, is also applicable to all building functions: offices, tourism infrastructure, housing and mixed functions.

4a: Reduce the ecological footprint of Belgian consumption on global biodiversity

The ecological footprint* is a way of measuring the pressure we put on resources and ecosystems. It measures the area of land and water needed by a human population to produce the resources it consumes and absorb its waste under current technological conditions. The ecological footprint can be used to track progress towards sustainability.

Calculated footprints are estimates based on assumptions that are used as a communication tool to enable individuals, organisations and governments to formulate policies, set targets and monitor progress towards sustainability (WWF, 2005).

In Belgium, the average ecological footprint is 7.2 ha per inhabitant, compared to a carrying capacity of only 1.2 ha per person³¹. This indicates that Belgium is a major contributor to the depletion of the world's ecological resources, as these resources are consumed faster than nature can regenerate them. Belgium's dependence on imports of goods and services from around the world has an impact on global biodiversity. Our consumption of imported meat, soy, palm oil, coffee, cocoa and other products, as well as non-food products such as textiles, paper, rubber and leather, leads to deforestation and biodiversity loss in many countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

The first step is to gain a more concrete understanding of our consumption habits so that we can then identify the legislative measures needed to reduce the negative impact of our consumption on biodiversity. At the same time, the implementation of European regulations, such as the Regulation on Critical Raw Materials, the Regulation on Imported Deforestation and the Due Diligence Directive for Sustainable Development, described in this strategy,

is already an important lever to achieve this goal (see obj. 2.2, 4f.1, 5.2).

TARGET 5: INTEGRATE BIODIVERSITY ACROSS SOCIETY AND RELEVANT SECTORAL POLICIES

Sectoral integration of biodiversity or “mainstreaming” means the integration of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use into cross-sectoral plans such as sustainable development, climate change adaptation and mitigation, trade, international cooperation and poverty alleviation, and into sectoral plans such as agriculture, fisheries, forestry, mining, energy, tourism, transport, chemicals, finance, science policy and others. It implies changes in development models, strategies and plans.

As biodiversity affects almost every economic sector, its protection cannot be limited to environmental policies. Biodiversity must become the basis for integrated economic and social development. The link between social policies (such as job creation) and biodiversity should also be emphasised, as should the impact of biodiversity loss on human well-being and health in particular. One of the main causes of biodiversity loss is the implementation of a number of sectoral and horizontal policies that affect ecosystems and species.

The impact of sectoral activities on biodiversity should be taken into account and biodiversity stakeholders should be consulted. This means that biodiversity concerns should be taken into account in the development and implementation of all sectoral plans, programmes, legislation and policies that may have an impact on biodiversity.

There is also a need to help administrations and individual departments develop the skills and expertise to address biodiversity issues within their own spheres of influence. Biodiversity is an important socio-economic asset and integrating biodiversity issues into sectoral policies also benefits the sector by encouraging more sustainable use of this resource.

Several sectors are particularly important for biodiversity: land use planning has a major impact on biodiversity (see Objective 2), as it can play an important role in habitat fragmentation and cause uncontrolled development pressure on biodiversity;

³¹ Source: National Footprint and Biocapacity Accounts 2023 edition (Data Year 2019)

the industrial, transport and energy sectors (see Objective 4) can have a global and regional impact on biodiversity through climate change and acidification. They can also have local impacts through habitat fragmentation, habitat destruction and wildlife disturbance, etc. The 2030 target will only be met if all relevant sectors integrate biodiversity into their plans and policies.

Moreover, companies should not only look at the impact they have on natural capital, but also understand how they depend on it. This shift in mindset will enable them to contextualise their relationship with natural capital and make holistic decisions that create value for nature, people and society, in addition to business and the economy.

Objective 5 of the NBS is the cornerstone of sectoral integration of biodiversity issues and stakeholder engagement in the implementation of the NBS.

Operational objectives

5.1 Promote and support stakeholder engagement through partnerships at all levels of biodiversity decision-making

Stakeholders (regional, federal and local governments, farmers, fishermen, environmentalists, natural resource managers, foresters, the private sector, researchers, non-governmental organisations, youth, citizens, etc) should be given the opportunity to be involved in biodiversity decision-making. The Aarhus Convention (Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters) recognises the rights of the public and imposes obligations on public authorities regarding access to information, public participation and access to justice. Belgium signed the Convention on 25 June 1998 and ratified it on 23 January 2003.

Individual behaviour needs to be taken into account, as individuals are stakeholders in biodiversity and need to be made accountable. Therefore, a specific methodology needs to be developed.

Moreover, effective partnerships should be based on certain key principles and criteria. These include a stable and active role for public authorities, a governance system that balances power imbalances,

and accountability and transparency of members regarding the information they collect and publish. It is also crucial to establish a complaints and internal monitoring mechanism, as well as a transparent regulatory framework with recognised standards and certifications.

Partnerships should be developed that actively connect stakeholders to share information and expertise and promote positive linkages between biodiversity and other sectors. This implies consultation and cooperation between and within different governments and stakeholders in the field. The participation of different stakeholders will increase their cooperation and involvement. This will increase support for biodiversity protection and encourage actions in this area. Proactive campaigns are needed, especially through social media, which can also reach ignorant and vulnerable target groups, possibly in collaboration with organisations active in this field.

Similarly, it is crucial that the administrations of the different sectors and at the different political levels involved (federal, regional and local) work together in a complementary and integrated way, based on the principle of subsidiarity, to preserve biodiversity.

The Belgian Biodiversity Alliance (BBA), launched in 2022, is a national initiative in favour of biodiversity that brings together players from all sectors - citizens, companies, municipalities, financial institutions, administrations, etc. - around a single goal: to restore biodiversity and fight its erosion in Belgium and beyond, in a very concrete way, by making voluntary commitments. The BBA provides a forum for the exchange of examples and expertise, with the aim of creating a network of stakeholders and initiatives throughout Belgium that contribute to the national, European and global biodiversity goals towards Vision 2050, a life in harmony with nature for the benefit of man and planet.

5.2 Encourage and enable the private sector, including companies and financial institutions, to regularly and transparently monitor, assess and disclose their risks, dependencies and impacts on biodiversity to progressively reduce negative impacts on biodiversity, increase positive impacts and promote actions to ensure sustainable production patterns through legal, administrative or policy measures.

Countering biodiversity loss requires a whole-of-society approach, and the private sector has a vital role to play. All businesses depend to a greater or lesser extent on the health of nature. They also have an impact on the health of nature, both positive and negative. By understanding the complex and dynamic relationships companies have with the health of natural resources and the ecosystem services they provide, they can make more informed decisions. Many companies own and manage land, so their activities have a direct impact on biodiversity (e.g. companies operating in sectors such as agriculture, water, forestry, tourism and transport). Other companies may have an indirect impact, such as financial service providers through their lending or investment policies, and retailers through the purchase of products derived from intensive agriculture.

Companies are increasingly aware of the risks and costs associated with inaction on nature restoration and conservation. While they cannot solve this global crisis alone, they need governments to create an environment that encourages action. The current global political and administrative system neither encourages the assessment and disclosure of impacts on nature nor supports action for nature.

The assessment and disclosure of risks, impacts and dependencies must be translated into concrete actions. The development of targets based on scientific data, accompanied by scientific calculation tools and sector analyses for key sectors, is an essential lever to accompany this transition. It is also necessary to support and promote platforms and networks of companies in transition. The integration of natural accounting into companies' accounting systems would also encourage companies to promote conservation practices and would help reduce the financing gap in favour of nature (see Objective 15).

In this context, the European Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (SDD), adopted in 2024, is of great importance. This directive requires companies to monitor and prevent environmental risks, such as deforestation, pollution and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. In addition, companies must ensure that their supply chains, which are often global, comply with these environmental standards. On the one hand, it is essential to transpose and strengthen its implementation at national level. This includes developing specific measures

to ensure that companies and financial institutions assess and disclose nature-related risks, dependencies and impacts, and develop nature-friendly transition plans in line with the requirements of the SDD.

To support companies in their transition to a sustainable environment and economy, the European Commission has developed the European Taxonomy (see operational objective 4.f1). The taxonomy is a classification system that defines criteria for economic activities in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal. It creates a frame of reference for investors and companies and protects against greenwashing practices. It accelerates the financing of projects that are already sustainable and those needed for the transition. The taxonomy regulation entered into force on 12 July 2020. It lays the foundation for the EU taxonomy by establishing four general conditions that an economic activity must meet to be considered environmentally sustainable. The SFDR and CSRD are also essential and useful tools in this respect.

The development of an ambitious and effective national action plan for the private sector should encourage and help national companies and financial institutions to contribute to the implementation of the targets of the Global Biodiversity Framework (K-M GBF). This plan would identify concrete actions to be targeted at companies for each objective of the global framework. It would build on existing national legislation related to the private sector and biodiversity while identifying gaps that need to be filled. It would also propose a list of actions, laws and regulations to make the strategy operational and ensure that these measures are as precise as possible. This plan would actively involve the private sector, with a defined timetable and indicators to measure progress.

5.3 End unsustainable consumption, in particular by reducing the global footprint of consumption equitably, including by halving global food waste, significantly reducing overconsumption and significantly reducing waste production.

The consumption of products and services impacts the environment in several ways. For example, the products we buy during their life cycle contribute directly or indirectly to climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss and resource depletion in Belgium and other areas. Today's unsustainable consumption



and production patterns depend on the extraction, processing and use of an increasing number of the world's natural resources. In Belgium, both the federal government and the regions are responsible for food waste.

Belgium's three regions have each introduced a sustainable food plan to promote environmentally friendly food systems and improve food safety. In Flanders, the Sustainable Food Action Plan, adopted in 2019, aims to encourage sustainable farming practices and reduce food waste. Wallonia, for its part, launched its Walloon Food Plan in 2019, which encourages the consumption of local and seasonal products while supporting short distribution channels. For its part, Brussels launched its Sustainable Food Plan, also in 2019, aimed at improving the sustainability of urban food systems and raising public awareness of healthy eating.

At EU level, the “farm to fork” strategy (introduced in objective 4b.1) aims to promote sustainable food consumption by reducing food losses and waste. This means that the food chain, which includes production, transport, distribution, marketing and consumption of food, has a neutral or positive impact on the environment. The focus is on research, innovation, knowledge and advice, as these are seen as key factors in enabling all players in the food chain to achieve sustainability.

The EU Waste Framework Directive (Directive 2008/98/EC), adopted in 2008, establishes a legal framework for waste management and aims to promote the sustainable use of resources, reduce the negative environmental impacts of waste generation and management, and encourage waste recycling and recovery.

The transition to a circular economy is a crucial step in achieving this objective, as well as many other goals of this strategy. The EU Circular Economy Action Plan, adopted in 2020, aims to promote a more efficient use of resources by reducing waste, encouraging reuse and recycling, and boosting sustainable innovation. Targeting key sectors such as electronics, construction, textiles and packaging, the action plan proposes concrete measures to transform the European economy into a regenerative model capable of reducing its ecological footprint while increasing competitiveness. It is therefore essential to address the consumption of

material resources by creating European legislation on material resources, in order to achieve the four objectives of the Circular Economy Action Plan and respect the limits of our planet. It will also be necessary to define the thresholds that need to be reached to bring Belgium's footprint in line with planetary limits and to monitor the progress of regional and federal interventions.

The EU strategy for sustainable and circular textiles is a concrete example of this. The strategy focuses on textile production and consumption and recognises the importance of the textile sector. It takes into account the whole life cycle of textile products and proposes coordinated actions to change the way we produce and consume textiles. These European initiatives must be implemented at national level.

5.4 Ensure that the public and private sectors promote sustainable consumption patterns and help consumers make sustainable consumption choices

Overconsumption is widely encouraged in society by advertising, marketing, programmed ageing, social pressure and the disposable culture (disposable items). It is essential to educate consumers about the impact of their consumption. Several sources can play a role in this education, including schools and universities, governments and the family. It is important to recognise that companies are also an important means of sharing information.

Access to information is essential to promote sustainable consumption, including disclosure of the carbon footprint of certain products. Competent authorities should develop a framework and guidelines for businesses, and implementation should be discussed in collaboration with the private sector. The development and use of labels can be a valuable approach to inform consumers and achieve these goals. However, this will only be really useful if the certified products meet ecological criteria and are not ‘greenwashed’. It is also important to support players who already offer sustainable consumption models.

5.5 Include biodiversity criteria in public procurement policy

Government agencies are big consumers. In Europe, for example, they spend 16% of the EU's gross

domestic product. By using their purchasing power to buy goods and services that also respect the environment and biodiversity, they can make an important contribution to sustainable development. Governments can also show citizens, businesses and organisations how they can really change their attitudes by making the right choices as consumers.

Green public procurement can have a direct or indirect positive impact on biodiversity. It covers areas such as transport and construction, office equipment, recyclable paper, activities in developing countries with the support of the Belgian government. In canteens, minimum requirements can be defined in terms of plant proteins, organic food and seasonal, sustainable and local food, coupled with a limit on food waste. Conditions can be set on the origin and production of raw materials (e.g. wood) and food (soy, oil, meat and fish, etc.).

At EU level, the Public Procurement Directive 2014/24/EU encourages the use of environmental considerations in public procurement. Public authorities are allowed to include environmental criteria in their procurement procedures. The directive recognises that public procurement can contribute to sustainable development objectives, including environmental protection.

In Belgium, initiatives have already been taken at federal and regional levels to adopt a 'green' public procurement policy to promote goods that are less harmful to the environment (e.g. promoting the use of wood products from sustainable forests or including environmental criteria - including biodiversity - in the procurement procedure for the Clean Development Mechanism and Joint Implementation). Biodiversity conservation is taken into account in some public procurement, but this is not done systematically or uniformly. Therefore, it is recommended that specific criteria be developed and implemented for each sector. Moreover, better training of public procurers in biodiversity criteria is needed to ensure consistent and meaningful application.

5.6 Eliminate, phase out or reform incentives, including subsidies, that are detrimental to biodiversity to minimise or avoid negative impacts on biodiversity, and encourage the development and implementation of incentives conducive to the conservation and sustainable use of biodi-

versity, including economic, fiscal and financial instruments

Defining environmentally harmful subsidies is challenging because subsidies come in different forms. In IEEP *et al.* 2007, these subsidies are regarded as “the result of government action that provides consumers or producers with a benefit to increase their income or reduce their costs, but in doing so discriminates against good environmental practices”. These financial incentives or subsidies provided by governments or other entities are often intended to promote social or economic growth, but unintentionally come at the expense of sustainable development.

While these subsidies initially appear to stimulate economic progress and job creation, they often exacerbate environmental problems. It is common knowledge that many subsidies directly or indirectly contribute to the depletion of natural capital, one of the pillars of sustainable development. The examples are well known: waterlogging and salinisation through subsidised irrigation, deforestation through subsidised logging, overfishing through subsidised fishing fleets.

Harmful subsidies are not always easy to identify, as it is necessary to determine in detail the criteria under which their effects may be harmful to the objective of sustainable development. To remedy this situation, it is crucial to start identifying subsidies that are harmful to nature and the environment by the end of 2025, and to develop a plan to phase them out. This plan should take into account stakeholder participation, a just transition and robust accountability and governance processes. These harmful subsidies should also be redirected to activities that benefit biodiversity.

Although the EU has long been committed to eliminating and phasing out environmentally harmful subsidies, progress has been slow. More measures and efforts need to be taken at national and European level to address this problem.

5.7 Ensure that biodiversity and its multiple values are fully integrated into strategic environmental assessments and/or environmental impact assessments



Clear and legally binding rules prevent competent authorities from approving projects and plans that may cause irreversible damage to biodiversity unless they are justified by imperative reasons of overriding public interest.

Consequently, environmental impact assessment (EIA) and strategic environmental assessment (SEA) procedures should include biodiversity criteria and refer to relevant national, European and international policy documents, such as the Belgian Biodiversity Strategy, the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, the CBD and biodiversity-related conventions and agreements. In this context, the guidelines on the integration of climate change and biodiversity in EIA and SEA published by the European Commission (2013) under the EIA and SEA guidelines (see below) should be applied.

To promote participatory environmental policy, it is important to link strategic planning (impact assessment of plans and programmes related to the environment) with public participation, as required by European directives.

The Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo, 1991) and its protocol and amendments define the obligations of Parties to assess the environmental impact of certain activities at an early planning stage. It also establishes the general obligation of States to notify and consult each other on all major projects under consideration that may have a significant adverse transboundary impact on the environment.

The European legislative framework already provides for the assessment of the impact of projects and plans on biodiversity:

- Environmental Impact Assessment Directive 85/337/EEC has been amended three times and codified in Directive 2011/92/EU. Under this directive, Member States must ensure that projects likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of their nature, size or location are made subject to an environmental impact assessment.
- Article 6 of the Habitats Directive requires an appropriate assessment of any plan or project which, alone or in combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site.

- The Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (2001/42/EC; Strategic Environmental Assessment, SEA) requires certain plans and programmes in the public sector to undergo a systematic environmental assessment. The SEA directive specifically defines biodiversity as an issue that must be included in the environmental report.

These provisions have been transposed into the Belgian federal and regional legal framework. However, it is necessary to help the initiators of relevant projects, plans and programmes assess whether their projects, plans and programmes are likely to have a significant impact on biodiversity and, if so, whether they should be subject to a SEA (e.g. by drafting guidelines or establishing an advisory committee with biodiversity experts). In addition, a set of biodiversity criteria to be considered as part of the environmental assessment, i.e. in the assessment report, may also prove useful in this regard.

5.8 Taking biodiversity issues into account in national export credit policy

Export credit agencies provide financial support (loans, guarantees, insurance) for projects in southern and eastern Europe. They also aim to help national industries abroad. Export credit policies can have a significant impact on the environment and biodiversity in particular (e.g. by supporting projects to build dams, pipelines, etc.).

It is important to review the environmental criteria used to assess investments by export credit agencies and other publicly funded financial institutions and to ensure that these criteria take biodiversity into account. Project analysis procedures should ensure that activities that cause irreversible damage to biodiversity are stopped.

Export credit agencies should implement more transparent eligibility criteria and specify which international obligations and commitments made by Belgium will be considered. The following actions can also help these agencies integrate biodiversity into national export credit policy:

- Establish a standardised procedure to assess whether a project meets Belgium's international biodiversity obligations and commitments.

- Organise training for export credit agency staff on Belgium's biodiversity obligations and commitments.

Another measure to promote the integration of biodiversity into export credit policy is to ask companies to sign a letter of intent committing to meet the targets of the National Biodiversity Strategy.

OBJECTIVE 6: ENSURE THE FAIR AND EQUITABLE SHARING OF BENEFITS ARISING FROM THE USE OF GENETIC RESOURCES AND DIGITAL SEQUENCING INFORMATION ON GENETIC RESOURCES (“ACCESS AND BENEFIT SHARING, ABS”); FACILITATE ACCESS TO GENETIC RESOURCES AND PROMOTE A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN SHARED BENEFITS

The fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources (GR) is the third objective of the CBD and is as important as the other two in meeting the target of halting biodiversity loss by 2030. It ensures equity between the users of genetic resources that benefit from biodiversity and the countries that provide these resources, with the dual aim of providing financial incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and mobilising new resources focused on biodiversity. Access and benefit-sharing are included in several international instruments. In the Convention, the framework for implementing the third objective is defined in Article 15. In addition, Article 8(j) contains a provision to encourage the equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

Since access to GR generally involves only taking small samples of material, the impact on biodiversity as such is relatively limited. However, compliance with the ABS provisions of the CBD and the Nagoya Protocol is paramount to respect countries' sovereign rights over their natural resources and to provide biodiversity custodians with direct incentives for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, especially in the world's biologically richest and often most vulnerable countries.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Conference of the

Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol first addressed the issue of digital sequence information (DSI) on genetic resources at their respective meetings in December 2016. The term “digital sequence information on genetic resources (DSI)” refers to data derived from dematerialised genetic resources, although there are still divergent views on the definition and scope of this term under the CBD: interpretations range from limited (genetic sequence data - GSD) to very broad (all data and information in digital form). In December 2023, at its 15th meeting, the Conference of the Parties decided to establish a multilateral mechanism for sharing the benefits arising from the use of DSI on genetic resources.

The Nagoya Protocol

In 2010, the Parties to the CBD adopted the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilisation (“Access and Benefit Sharing”, ABS). The Protocol seeks to share the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources in a fair and equitable manner, including through appropriate access to genetic resources and appropriate transfer of relevant technologies, taking into account all rights to those resources and technologies, and through appropriate funding, so as to contribute to the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components.

The Nagoya Protocol is an additional protocol to the CBD that aims to provide a transparent legal framework for the effective implementation of the third objective of the CBD, thus contributing to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

The protocol came into force on 12 October 2014.

Meanwhile, other instruments related to access and benefit-sharing were also negotiated and/or came into force and are mutually reinforcing, as indicated in the recitals and in Article 4 of the Nagoya Protocol. Some of these relate directly to Belgium. For example, Belgium ratified the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in

2007. The objectives of this Treaty are the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their use, in accordance with the CBD, for sustainable agriculture and food security.

The core of this Treaty is a “multilateral system” designed to facilitate access to the genetic resources of 64 major crops and forages and to share benefits in a fair and equitable manner. The Treaty recognises the rights of farmers, including the protection of traditional knowledge, and the right to participate fairly in benefit-sharing and national decision-making related to the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources.

Belgium is bound by the relevant ABS provisions of the CBD (which provides the overall framework for the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol) and has already taken several initiatives to implement the ABS provisions of the CBD. This is done through patent legislation and the development of a voluntary code of conduct to help countries comply with access and benefit-sharing requirements for the transfer of microbial genetic resources (“International Code of Conduct for the Sustainable Use of Microorganisms and the Regulation of Access, MOSAICC”). The National Botanic Garden of Belgium is also a member of the International Plant Exchange Network (IPEN) programme of botanic gardens in the EU for the exchange of plant material. IPEN enables participating gardens to exchange material for non-commercial purposes in line with the objectives of the CBD.

The stakeholders involved in the implementation of this objective are: federal, regional and municipal governments and institutions, regional nature agencies, the various sectors active in research and development (including health care, biotechnology, etc.), universities, professional federations involved in the sectors concerned, the general public, holders of traditional knowledge, the CBD secretariat, GR users and any association working in the same direction as the NBS.

Operational objectives

6.1 Increase awareness of the concept of ABS in the context of the CBD and Nagoya Protocol, and disseminate information on ABS widely

It is important to make users and providers of genetic resources aware of the CBD and related ABS provisions (including the Nagoya Protocol), as well as “best practices” to ensure compliance and benefit sharing. As the ABS provisions of the CBD and Nagoya Protocol are insufficiently known and can be ambiguous and difficult to understand for practitioners, it is important to redouble efforts to promote their understanding, explain their relevance and implications, and build capacity.

Belgium took a first step towards an information campaign on ABS by launching an analysis of Belgian stakeholders’ knowledge of ABS provisions and the impact of these provisions on their policies for implementing ABS principles³². Following this assessment, Belgium included several awareness-raising and capacity-building activities in the federal plan for integrating biodiversity in four key sectors (2009-2013).

The Belgian Clearinghouse for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD CHM), which is part of an international network of CBD clearinghouses, is an important tool for exchanging information on the CBD and its protocols. It was established to illustrate what Belgium is doing in the framework and implementation of the CBD (Belgian CBD CHM: <http://www.biodiv.be/>).

As part of Belgium’s development cooperation programmes on biodiversity in partner countries in the South, supporting the establishment of national CBD exchange centres is a priority.

• CBD instrument

To facilitate and support the development and strengthening of the capacities of individuals, institutions and communities for effective implementation of the access and benefit-sharing provisions of the CBD and the Bonn Guidelines in particular, the CBD adopted the “Capacity-Building Action Plan for Access to Genetic Resources and Benefit-Sharing” at its 7th session. The action plan identifies key

³² Christine Frison, Tom Dedeurwaerdere. July 2006. Belgian federal survey: ‘Public infrastructures and regulations regarding access to genetic resources and the sharing of benefits arising from their use for innovation in life science research. Access, conservation and use of biological diversity in the public interest

areas requiring capacity-building initiatives and mechanisms to implement capacity-building in these areas.

6.2 Ensure the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilisation

Belgium signed the Nagoya Protocol on 20 September 2011. On 27 October 2011, the Interministerial Conference for the Environment confirmed that “accelerated ratification of the ABS Protocol is a priority for Belgium”. In our country, the Nagoya Protocol falls under the competence of the Regions, Communities and the Federal Government.

European legislation relating to the Nagoya Protocol consists of the EU regulation and the Commission implementing regulation. The first is a regulation on measures for user compliance with the Nagoya Protocol on access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their use in the Union. This regulation sets out the rules for compliance with access and benefit-sharing in accordance with the provisions of the Nagoya Protocol. It applies to all EU member states, whether they have ratified the Nagoya Protocol or not. The second regulation sets the implementing rules for the EU regulation on registration of collections, user compliance monitoring and best practices. The implementing regulation specifies when, to whom and what information must be submitted when submitting the due diligence required by the basic regulation. It also describes the procedures to be followed when a collection applies to become a “registered collection” and when a user association or other stakeholders apply to recognise “best practices”.

In Flanders, the decree on access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their use came into force on 22 April 2019. The decree stipulates that the use (research and development) of Flemish “endemic” genetic resources is open. Compliance with the Nagoya Protocol and EU regulation on ABS is managed by the Agency for Nature and Forests. The Decree of the Walloon Region on the application of the Nagoya Protocol was published on 16 June 2020. The decree provides that access to biological diversity is open,

but notification is required. The acknowledgement of receipt of notification is considered the internationally recognised certificate of compliance. At the federal level, a law implementing the Nagoya Protocol came into force on 13 October 2023. This law establishes obligations for users of federal genetic resources. These include notification requirements and benefit-sharing arrangements for the non-commercial and commercial use of genetic resources. The law complements the EU regulation governing the control of users of genetic resources in the EU.

Access and benefit-sharing is a major theme of the CBD, but the issue of access, exchange and use of genetic resources is also relevant to other fora. Key international fora dealing with ABS issues include the following:

- FAO (International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, phytosanitary agreements)
- World Trade Organisation (Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights - TRIPS Agreement)
- The World Intellectual Property Organisation and its Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore
- World Health Organisation and more specifically the influenza pandemic preparedness framework for influenza virus exchange and access to vaccines and other benefits
- The UN Convention on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (“BBNJ”).
- United Nations declaration on the rights of farmers and others working in food systems (UNDROP)

Better cooperation is needed between the CBD and these forums to improve the effectiveness of implementation and ensure coherent and consistent views within them.

There may also be a link between the CBD and CITES regarding ABS, and it may be useful for CITES

implementing agencies and CBD-related agencies to fully understand ABS issues and how they may be affected by the implementation of CITES, and vice versa. A better understanding of ABS issues can ensure consistency in decisions made under CITES and the CBD to avoid misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

At the Belgian level, the coordination mechanisms provided by the Coordinating Committee on International Environmental Policy (CCIEP) should be refined to ensure cooperation between nodes and, consequently, consistency in national implementation of ABS-related provisions within the framework of the various relevant processes.

6.3 By 2030, create operational mechanisms to protect the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity

Indigenous and Local Communities (ILCs) are closely associated with biodiversity and contribute to its protection. The traditional knowledge possessed by indigenous and local communities about the potential uses of the biodiversity that surrounds them is an important basis for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. It is an important resource, especially for the search for potentially useful genetic resources. This ancestral knowledge must be preserved and maintained.

Holders of traditional knowledge are key stakeholders in ABS agreements and initiatives. Article 8(j) of the CBD specifically addresses the preservation of knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. It also encourages the wider application of such knowledge, with the adoption and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, with the understanding that any benefits arising from the use of such traditional knowledge in relation to genetic resources will be shared.

In addition, the Nagoya Protocol reinforces Article 8(j) of the CBD by requiring Parties to take measures, where necessary, to ensure that benefits arising from the use of traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources and genetic resources

held by indigenous and local communities (in accordance with national legislation on the established rights of indigenous and local communities to such genetic resources) are shared fairly and equitably with the indigenous and local communities holding such knowledge or genetic resources (Article 5). Similarly, Articles 6 and 7 of the Nagoya Protocol require Parties to take the necessary measures to ensure that the prior free, informed consent or consent and participation of ILCs is obtained (in accordance with national legislation) for access to genetic resources and traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources held by such ILCs.

Articles 13 and 15.1 of International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 169 specifically recognise the rights of indigenous and local communities to own, control and use their lands, territories and natural resources. These rights include the right to participate in the management and conservation of these resources³³. Belgium will support initiatives that strengthen these rights.

Belgium participates in relevant international discussions and is involved in several processes related to traditional knowledge. Traditional knowledge, innovations and practices should be recognised in access and benefit-sharing agreements. The participation of representatives of indigenous and local communities in appropriate forums should be supported. Moreover, the preservation and sharing of traditional knowledge will be integrated into Belgian development cooperation or scientific cooperation projects targeting indigenous and local communities as key stakeholders.

The Flemish government deals with intangible heritage in its cultural policy. Local knowledge and practices related to biodiversity could also be included in this policy.

Regarding GMOs in agriculture covered by patents from multinationals, particular care should be taken to ensure that their use does not alter or eliminate traditional agricultural practices, which would lead to threats to biodiversity and society. Moreover, since transgenes can sometimes come from living organisms traditionally known for their interesting

³³ The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (document A/61/L.67) was adopted on 13 September

properties, a fair distribution of the benefits derived from these genes should be promoted.

● The CBD instrument

At COP10, Parties to the Convention adopted the “Tkarihwaíé:ri Code of Ethics to ensure respect for the cultural and intellectual heritage of indigenous and local communities relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity”. These voluntary guidelines aim to provide a collaborative framework to ensure the full participation of indigenous and local communities in assessing their cultural, environmental and social concerns and interests in relation to development projects that are taking place or likely to impact sacred sites and lands and waters traditionally inhabited or used by indigenous and local communities. Moreover, guidelines are provided on how to consider traditional knowledge, innovations and practices in impact assessment processes and promote the use of appropriate technologies.

6.4 Have a functional ABS Exchange Web (Clearing House) by 2030

The Nagoya Protocol establishes an access and benefit-sharing clearing house (ABS-CH) as part of the CBD's coordination mechanism, the CHM. The ABS-CH is to serve as a tool for sharing information on access and benefit-sharing (Article 14 of the Protocol). It also plays a role in raising awareness, particularly of the importance of genetic resources and traditional knowledge related to genetic resources, and is seen as an important tool for promoting and strengthening legal certainty, clarity and transparency in the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol. In this context, one of the main objectives of the European Commission should be to promote compliance through increased clarity, transparency and certainty.

OBJECTIVE 7: REGULATE, MANAGE OR CONTROL THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH THE USE AND RELEASE OF LIVING GMOS

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) can have negative impacts on biodiversity. When released

into the environment, these modified organisms can interact with native species and ecosystems and can disrupt the natural balance.

To avoid disparities between different Belgian entities with shared competences in biosafety, a harmonised implementation of the European regulatory framework on biosafety was necessary. All regulatory aspects of the use of GMOs and pathogens are assessed in Belgium in a coordinated manner. The legal basis for this centralised biosafety advisory system is the Cooperation Agreement on Biosafety of 25 April 1997. This cooperation agreement is currently under review.

Under the cooperation agreement, biosafety expertise in Belgium is provided by two complementary bodies: the Biosafety Advisory Council (mission and operation) and the Biosafety and Biotechnology Unit (permanent biosafety expertise centre).

Cartagena Protocol

In 2000, Parties to the CBD adopted the Cartagena Protocol on the safe handling, transfer and movement of living modified organisms (GMOs) resulting from modern biotechnology. In general, LMOs are considered GMOs, but definitions and interpretations of the term GMO vary widely. The main objective of the Cartagena Protocol is to ensure the protection of biodiversity and human health by regulating the transboundary movement of LMOs. The protocol aims to promote transparency, risk assessment and informed consent by countries involved in the import and export of LGOs, in order to protect biological diversity while encouraging responsible use of biotechnology.

Operational objectives

7.1 Strengthen the implementation of biosafety measures as stipulated in Article 8(g) of the Convention on Biological Diversity and measures related to biotechnology governance and benefit-sharing as stipulated in Article 19 of the Convention

Article 8(g) of the CBD requires Parties to “establish or maintain means to regulate, manage or control

the risks associated with the use and release of living modified organisms resulting from biotechnology that are likely to have adverse environmental effects that may adversely affect the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, taking also into account risks to human health”.

Article 19 of the CBD, titled “Management of Biotechnology and Benefit-Sharing”, sets out key provisions for responsible management of biotechnology research and its impact on genetic resources under an international agreement. It emphasises the importance of active participation by all Contracting Parties, especially developing countries that provide genetic resources for such research. It also stresses the need for fair and equitable access to the benefits and results of biotechnology based on these resources, under mutually agreed terms. Moreover, it stresses the need to consider drafting a protocol governing the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms from biotechnology, with emphasis on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Finally, the article emphasises the obligation of Contracting Parties to provide information on safety requirements and potential adverse effects of introduced organisms to other Contracting Parties, either directly or through entities under their jurisdiction.

A concrete example where these articles of the Convention can be applied is the issue of new genetic techniques (NTGs), on which stakeholders have raised concerns about their impact on biodiversity. The European Commission has launched a strategic initiative to adapt the current regulatory framework for GMOs to the specificities of these NTG plants. In the impact assessment published along with the proposal, the Commission stresses the need to maintain current standards of environmental protection and human and animal health

Research on NTGs should include a thorough assessment of scientific uncertainties and social impacts, while applying the precautionary principle to ensure the protection of human health and the environment. In addition, it is crucial to conduct appropriate risk analysis and clearly define the institutions responsible for these analyses. Finally, responsibility for the risks of NTGs should be regulated by law to ensure transparency and accountability of the stakeholders involved.

7.2 Promote the integration of biodiversity and biosecurity into partner countries' development plans

Biodiversity loss threatens the livelihoods of the world's poorest populations, who are most dependent on biodiversity for their survival. Until now, there has been little interest in integrating biodiversity monitoring mechanisms into partner countries' development plans. These plans usually set overall objectives and include projects and activities aimed at improving the direct economic development of the country. However, to drastically reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development, these plans must take full account of the environmental dimension and biodiversity in particular. Belgium will therefore encourage (e.g. through the EU or other multidonor partnerships) partner countries to integrate biodiversity and biosecurity into their poverty reduction strategies and/or national sustainable development strategies, as well as into their health programmes and any other development initiatives they undertake (see Target 12).

Awareness of the concept of ecological footprint should also be raised.

TARGET 8: IMPROVE AND COMMUNICATE SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE ON BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

For effective conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, all its components at all organisational levels, i.e. from genes to ecosystems, must be correctly identified and monitored spatially and temporally. Adequate knowledge of the status and trends of biodiversity and the services it provides is a prerequisite for adaptive management of ecosystems. However, there are many gaps in our knowledge of primary data on biodiversity and the role of taxa in ecosystem functioning.

The impacts of current and future biodiversity loss on both ecosystem health and human well-being are poorly understood, while the effectiveness of policy measures remains largely undocumented. The synergy between policy responses and research depends largely on our ability to improve and communicate our current knowledge and the additional knowledge needed on biodiversity.

Closing the gap requires (i) more investment and capacity building in key biological disciplines such as taxonomy and ecology, (ii) easy and open access to biodiversity data and research information, and (iii) better coordination and communication between policy and research.

The above shortcomings are present at national level but are particularly evident in developing countries. The Belgian government is increasingly providing support and funding for research and training, with the aim of improving biodiversity knowledge and capacity in these countries. These efforts will in turn contribute to better implementation of the multi-lateral environmental agreements ratified by these countries. Financial support can also be extended to establishing partnerships with key players, such as local and international NGOs, to encourage the adoption of research recommendations in partner regions.

- **CBD instruments and articles and global biodiversity reports**

The Global Taxonomy Initiative (GTI) was established under the Convention on Biological Diversity to advance taxonomic knowledge and promote biodiversity conservation. Adopted at COP-6 in 2002, it aims to build taxonomic capacity, facilitate access to information and help developing countries acquire taxonomic expertise (CBD COP-4 decision IV/1).

The Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO) is a periodic report prepared by the CBD Secretariat. It summarises the state of biological diversity and analyses the measures taken by the global community to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, as well as the equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. The fifth edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook, published in 2020, provides a global overview of progress towards the Aichi biodiversity targets and is based on a series of indicators, surveys and assessments.

IPBES assessment reports are published results on scientific, technical and socio-economic issues that take into account different approaches, visions and knowledge systems, including global assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem services with a defined geographical

scope and thematic or methodological assessments based on the standard or accelerated approach. They consist of two or more parts, including a summary for policymakers.

The stakeholders involved in the implementation of this objective are: federal and regional environmental and agricultural authorities, educational institutions, national networks of scientific and political experts in support of IPBES, universities, federal research institutions, NGOs, sectors, the National Biosecurity Council, researchers, the Directorate General for Development Cooperation (DGD), the general public and any association working in the same direction as the NBS

Operational objectives

8.1 Ensure that the best available data, information and knowledge on biodiversity are accessible to policymakers, practitioners and the public

The dissemination of scientific data and information on biodiversity should not only target the scientific community, but should reach the widest possible audience in the appropriate language, including policy makers, teachers, young people and the general public. Communication should therefore be adapted to different profiles in terms of form, content and channels used. The development of databases providing access to current and past studies and research could be a very useful tool for this purpose. To achieve this, primary scientific data and conclusions should be presented in a format and language accessible to an amateur audience. This is especially important when it comes to including biodiversity topics in education and awareness programmes.

It is crucial that data on pressures on biodiversity, such as the use of pesticides, nitrates or other chemicals, are transparent and easily accessible. This information is essential to enable researchers, political decision-makers and citizens to assess the extent of environmental impacts and take appropriate action to protect ecosystems.



Recognition of the importance of centralised databases is crucial to this operational objective. Compilations and syntheses of existing data and (meta)information, using electronic tools, will provide an even stronger basis for identifying gaps in research needs and relevant policy priorities, and could serve as an essential catalogue to support access to genetic resources. The development of a web portal, in line with commitments under the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), could form the basis for a national species registry. The GBIF is an international network and data infrastructure and is an important data source for the implementation of the K-M GBF.

This operational objective is interdependent and requires the achievement of other operational objectives described in the strategy. Improving the interface between science and policy (see operational objective 8.5) is crucial to provide decision-makers with the most accurate information on biodiversity. In addition, emphasis should be placed on open access, by encouraging a policy of open access to biodiversity data and knowledge to ensure equitable access for all, regardless of financial constraints.

Finally, data visualisation can play an important role in turning complex information into easy-to-understand formats, making it easier to understand the information and make decisions.

8.2 Promote and encourage research that contributes to the knowledge and understanding of Belgian and global biodiversity and ecosystem services, as well as their values

The comprehensive and effective implementation of many of the actions identified in the NBS requires a significant improvement in the knowledge and understanding of biodiversity and ecosystem services provided in Belgium. Currently, methodologies are being developed for evaluating biodiversity and ecosystem services, including ecological aspects related to ecosystem structure and function, socio-economic aspects and monetary aspects. There is also a need for more research on biodiversity at genetic, species and ecosystem levels and rapid dissemination of the results of this peer-reviewed research to enable adaptive management.

Several items in the NBS require immediate action, for example to address immediate threats for which there is insufficient time to consider in-depth research to support relief actions. On the other hand, such immediate actions are likely to fail or have negative and unexpected side effects if in-depth research data are not available. It is therefore essential to design research projects so that the expected results can guide and support immediate actions, but also generate data that can help plan and implement long-term biodiversity conservation and management.

Biodiversa+ is a co-funded European Partnership for Biodiversity that supports excellence in biodiversity research with an impact on policy and society. Developed jointly by BiodivERsA and the European Commission (DG Research and Innovation and DG Environment), it was officially launched in October 2021. It works towards 5 main objectives: (1) To plan and support biodiversity research and innovation through a shared strategy (2) To establish a network of harmonised schemes to improve monitoring of biodiversity and ecosystem services across Europe (3) To contribute knowledge for the deployment of nature-based solutions and biodiversity valuation in the private sector (4) To ensure effective, science-based support for policy-making (5) To strengthen the relevance and impact of pan-European biodiversity research in a global context. Biodiversa+'s Belgian operational team is based at BelSPO.

8.3 Promote and encourage research on integrating biodiversity into sectoral policies

In Belgium, biodiversity is mainly threatened by human activities, which are often governed by sectoral policies. Integrating biodiversity management into sectoral policies means integrating biodiversity issues into all socio-economic sectors, such as agriculture, biotechnology, energy, fisheries, forestry and tourism (see objectives 4 and 5).

First, specific research should be developed to improve current knowledge on the impact of sectoral policies on biodiversity. For example, to get an idea of the effects of current agrotechnology on both agricultural biodiversity* and wildlife (e.g. pollinators).

Second, research efforts and resources should be allocated to developing sound methodologies to

assess the level of integration of biodiversity in these sectoral policies.

8.4 Improve our knowledge of the socio-economic benefits of biodiversity and ecosystem services

The integration of socioeconomic sciences into biodiversity research is critical if we are to slow and halt the ongoing human-induced loss of biodiversity. This involves analysing public awareness and perceptions and consumer attitudes and preferences towards biodiversity and then examining how these two factors relate to behaviour and public policy.

To influence policymaking and raise public awareness, there is a need to better understand the values of biodiversity (which are not limited to purely economic value), for example by improving valuation methods and conducting high-level studies on the values of biodiversity and ecosystem services in ecosystems of thematic importance. As part of the evaluation process, the relationship between health (physical and mental well-being) and biodiversity should also be studied more thoroughly. More research is needed on the link between changes in biodiversity and the increased frequency of certain existing human and animal diseases or the emergence of new diseases.

This requires a major push in transdisciplinary biodiversity research. Transdisciplinary research applies to research efforts that address real-world problems (problem-oriented research) and integrates practical knowledge (Bergmann *et al.*, 2005). Understanding and studying the consequences of biodiversity loss and restoration measures requires an interest in the complex and evolving interactions between social and ecological systems. This requires collaboration between different disciplines, as well as practical and experimental knowledge of those who use, manage and protect the environment.

8.5 Improve the Science-Policy interface on biodiversity and promote stakeholder participation

Science-Policy Interfaces (SPIs) are processes that manage the convergence points between science and policy, including the relationships between scientists and other players in the policy process. They enable the exchange of

information, co-evolution and joint improvement of knowledge to enrich the decision-making process and consolidate scientific knowledge. They involve not only scientific and political players, but also other stakeholders such as sector representatives, land managers and NGOs. Underlying these interfaces are different approaches, ranging from highly formal approaches such as the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), to less eminent approaches to science-policy relationships, such as research projects directly linked to decision-makers or informal contact groups working on specific issues.

The main characteristics of PSIs are their credibility, relevance and legitimacy:

- *Credibility* is the perceived quality, validity and scientific appropriateness of the people, processes and knowledge exchanged in the interface;
- *Relevance* is the relevance and responsiveness of the PSI instrument to political and societal needs;
- *Legitimacy* is the perceived fairness and balance of PSI processes for all parties involved in the dialogue.

The establishment of an Intergovernmental Science and Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) in 2012 has significantly improved the interface between science and policy. It brings together scientists, policymakers and other stakeholders from around the world to assess and synthesise scientific information, identify knowledge gaps and advise on policies and actions. Since its inception, IPBES has contributed to the implementation of the CBD by providing scientific assessments on various aspects of biodiversity, such as the status and trends of biodiversity, drivers of biodiversity loss, impacts of biodiversity loss on human well-being and possible policy options for conservation and sustainable use. In addition to the assessments produced, IPBES also produces summaries for political decision-makers.



Innovative solutions and methodologies are needed to optimise the links between research and policy and promote stakeholder participation in the development and implementation of new policies. The fragmentation of the institutional framework in Belgium means that many people are involved in biodiversity issues, which is not always conducive to effective work. Creative solutions need to be proposed to establish a mechanism and institutional arrangements to simplify procedures and ensure participation and complementary cooperation (including participation and consultation methods, effective communication models, etc.), and to ensure that the work is done effectively. The positive and negative impacts of socio-cultural and economic factors (including leisure time) should also be assessed. The establishment of a specific stakeholder consultation group by the Belgian authorities could help achieve this objective. This consultation group would enable an ongoing dialogue and cooperation between the government, the scientific community, conservation organisations and other key stakeholders.

Effective communication is an important aspect of linking research and policy. Courses and training materials could be developed to help researchers communicate more effectively, not only about the results of their research, but also about the research process, to better understand how research is planned and conducted. Policymakers could also benefit from training on how to use and seek scientific advice (e.g. how to ask the right questions) and how to identify appropriate sources of information.

The ability of government departments to use scientific information could be strengthened by encouraging transfers from universities and scientific institutions to the government. Secondments in the opposite direction - civil servants taking a sabbatical to join a university or scientific institution - could also help develop a certain expertise and networks.

OBJECTIVE 9: ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY THROUGH COMMUNICATION, EDUCATION, AWARENESS AND TRAINING

Information and awareness-raising are necessary prerequisites for the adoption of any policy and for any change in behaviour. As with many measures related to sustainable development, the successful implementation of the NBS will depend on the

understanding by civil society, private organisations and governments of the importance of protecting biodiversity and the measures needed to do so.

Voluntary organisations are involved in nature and environmental education. Government departments and scientific institutions are also involved in communication activities (publication of brochures, articles, etc.), but the work carried out is fragmented and insufficiently complementary, and groups with a greater impact on nature are not sufficiently targeted and should receive specialised education. In communication, it is crucial to link biodiversity to culture and to use new and traditional media to raise awareness of biodiversity issues (e.g. social networks, podcasts, press, radio, video, TV, internet).

Belgium can also draw on the results of existing Communication, Education, Public Awareness (CEPA) programmes, which have proven their worth in similar contexts. CEPA programmes were developed by the Ramsar Convention and by the EU for Natura 2000.

• CBD and UN instruments

UNESCO has been designated by the United Nations General Assembly as the body responsible for promoting the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), which aims to integrate biodiversity into all levels of formal education.

The work programme of the Global Initiative on Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA), adopted in 2002 (CBD Decision VI/19), recognises the importance of CEPA as a central tool to ensure effective implementation of the CBD at the national level.

The stakeholders involved in implementing this objective are federal, regional and municipal authorities, media organisations, teachers' and teachers' associations, conservation associations, youth movements, educational institutions and museums, research institutions, government agencies, the media, NGOs, the general public and any association working in the same way as the NBS.

Operational objectives

9.1 Work towards including biodiversity and ecosystem services and the ecosystem approach in educational programmes

In Belgium, communities are primarily responsible for providing school services and each of the three communities (Flemish-, French- and German-speaking) has its own autonomous education system.

Many students put environmental issues and even biodiversity protection at the top of their agenda. Unfortunately, few of them are aware of the threats to their immediate environment and the opportunities to take concrete action in their daily lives. The education system has a vital role to play here.

Education and training should focus on developing skills that improve understanding and acceptance of the need for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. Information should be presented not only as science, but also in a social, economic and political context so that young people can better understand the complex circumstances in which biodiversity conservation decisions are made. Practical skills, such as recognising plants and animals, should also be encouraged. Courses on the values of biodiversity and ecosystem services, as well as planning programmes applying the ecosystem approach, should be offered throughout the education system, from primary and secondary schools to technical colleges and universities, in secondary and higher agricultural education, as well as outside the school system (youth organisations, continuing education). In-service training courses on environmental issues, in particular on biodiversity, can be organised for teachers to include these issues in their lessons.

Today, several educational programmes on the environment and sustainable development exist in the official Belgian education system, especially at primary school level. Biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services should be systematically included in all curricula and at the different educational levels. Therefore, schools and teachers need better educational support (e.g. development of educational kits and publications on biodiversity for young people).

Coordination between different communities and between communities and schools is essential to achieve this goal. A centralised platform that brings together all school initiatives, provides a space where teachers can share best practices and offers guidance tools would serve several purposes. First, it would facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration among teachers, allowing them to draw from each other's experiences and implement effective teaching methods. Second, it would make it possible to monitor progress in biodiversity education in the Belgian education sector.

9.2 Increase awareness of the different values of biodiversity and nature's contributions to humans

People depend on fundamental biological systems and processes for their well-being and quality of life. Ecosystem services and the link between biodiversity and health, job creation, asset acquisition, etc. are not yet sufficiently recognised and understood.

It is necessary to encourage a better understanding and appreciation of the value of biodiversity and its functions in ecosystems for human well-being at all decision-making levels and among businesses, the general public, etc. The public needs to understand the impact it has on nature and biodiversity and what it can do to mitigate it. The public needs to understand the impact it has on nature and biodiversity and what it can do to mitigate it. Belgian households' consumption and production patterns have a significant impact on the environment and biodiversity. It is essential to convince people of the need to switch to sustainable patterns of production, consumption, land use and mobility.

There are many proposals to make nature and biodiversity a matter for citizens. Modern technologies and increasing access to electronic communication (social media) provide innovative opportunities to promote and encourage understanding of the importance of biodiversity and the measures needed to conserve it. Nevertheless, the importance of traditional communication systems should not be overlooked (media, local press, weekly TV and radio programmes on nature and biodiversity, thematic exhibitions, roundtables, etc.) Moreover, the importance of biodiversity, the ecosystem services it provides, and the consequences of its degradation

should be communicated in terms adapted to the specific audience concerned.

NGOs, nature associations, youth organisations, educational institutions and museums, research institutes, government agencies and the media play a key role in raising public awareness and communicating the importance of protecting local and global biodiversity. They should be encouraged by federal, regional or municipal agencies to ensure the continuous availability of accurate and convincing information on the benefits, costs and resources of biodiversity protection. Specific annual programmes and exhibitions organised by these organisations (such as the International Biodiversity Day on 22 May and events around specific sites or species) should also be supported.

9.3 Raise awareness among all sectors and stakeholders of the need for urgent and ambitious action to conserve, restore and sustainably use biodiversity

Several sectors, including the private sector, have an important role to play in biodiversity conservation and preservation as they have a significant (direct or indirect) impact on biodiversity.

Competent authorities are encouraged to educate and raise awareness in the private sector so that companies better understand the importance for society and their business to act for nature. Authorities should work with local business networks and other partners to raise awareness and share knowledge. Support tools (guidelines, measures, best practices) should also be made available to companies. Small businesses do not have the same capabilities as large companies, so appropriate tools should be developed and actively communicated through business networks.

In addition, joint capacity-building opportunities can be created in cooperation with the private sector, universities and educational institutions. For example, by promoting the use and accessibility of existing training materials, such as the free online course.

Appropriate communication strategies and training cycles should be put in place to explain how the respective sectors can improve their practices to help meet the 2030 targets for halting biodiversity

loss. Raising awareness is the first step to ensure the commitment of these sectors. Therefore, this operational objective goes hand in hand with Objective 4 and Operational Objective 5.2 of this NBS.

TARGET 10: STRENGTHEN THE BIODIVERSITY REGULATORY FRAMEWORK AND ENSURE IMPLEMENTATION, COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT OF BIODIVERSITY LEGISLATION

Legislation is an important tool that can contribute to the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of its components. The regulatory framework must be clear and precise. It must be respected by all and adapted if necessary.

Since few people comply with legal rules if non-compliance has no clear consequences, enforcement is essential to ensure compliance with existing legislation to protect biodiversity. Sanctions must be proportionate, dissuasive and effective.

The stakeholders involved in the implementation of this objective are: federal and regional authorities, the judiciary, inspectorates, customs, police and any association working in the same way as the NBS

Operational objectives

10.1 Ensure the national strategy is underpinned by effective legislation and improve its implementation

The “National Security Plan 2022-2025” (Federal Police, 2022) aims to help police forces address security issues in a comprehensive and integrated manner and strengthen the coherence of their actions. It addresses 15 security issues, including the environment (waste crime and CITES).

As mentioned in operational objective 2.2, Belgium has several CITES enforcement authorities, including police officers, FASFC inspectors, FPS Environment inspectors and customs officers. The enforcement authorities monitor compliance with the provisions of CITES.

Belgium should ensure that biodiversity is included in priority areas related to security. Moreover, the different aspects of biodiversity should be included in legal information processing tools, such as FEEDIS (Feeding Information System) or the general national database.

As a result of the division of competences in Belgium, most offences related to biodiversity are registered by the regional authorities, while prosecution policy falls under the competence of the federal state. Therefore, cooperation and coordination at the national level between all relevant actors (including inspection services, administrations and customs services) should be strengthened to ensure consistent and compatible measures and methodologies. International information-sharing mechanisms should also be optimised (Interpol, Europol, etc.). The increased use of online platforms for illegal wildlife trade has led to new challenges in detection and investigation, creating an urgent need for effective and innovative solutions

Finally, given the complex nature of the subject, specific training should be provided for those involved in the fight against biodiversity crime (police and control services, customs, prosecutors, inspectors, etc.). In this respect, the needs mainly relate to improving legal, technical and scientific knowledge.

10.2 Ensure full implementation and better enforcement of biodiversity legislation, including through training programmes for relevant authorities, in particular judges, prosecutors, inspectors and customs officials

The Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive contain several articles referring to prohibited activities. For example, Article 12 (Habitats Directive) prohibits the deliberate capture, killing or disturbance of certain animal species listed in Annex IV of the directive, unless specific derogations are granted. Article 7 (Birds Directive) prohibits destroying or damaging nests and taking or destroying eggs of wild birds, unless specific derogations are granted.

The implementation of these Directives at the Belgian level is also important to ensure their full implementation. It is imperative that competent authorities are well informed about the Natura 2000 framework and the legal provisions described

in these Directives. To ensure a robust implementation system, it is recommended that specific training programmes be developed and offered to judges and prosecutors. These programmes should give them a better understanding of their biodiversity responsibilities, including the identification of prohibited activities, the assessment of violations and the appropriate application of sanctions.

Other EU legislation, notably the Nature Restoration Ordinance, and international conventions aimed at environmental conservation, prohibit specific activities that can be penalised if not complied with. To ensure compliance with these rules, it is necessary to regularly update training programmes and awareness-raising tools while ensuring sufficient capacity within relevant departments to enable proper monitoring and strict implementation of biodiversity legislation.

10.3 Ensure full compliance and enforcement of the environmental liability regime (i.e. Directive 2004/35 EC on environmental liability) regarding offences against biodiversity

The aim of environmental liability is to make the person or organisation responsible for environmental damage (the polluter) pay to repair the damage caused (the polluter pays principle).

The European Parliament and Council Directive of 21 April 2004 establishes a framework for environmental liability based on the “polluter pays” principle to prevent and remedy environmental damage. Its basic principle is that an operator whose activity has caused environmental damage or an imminent threat of environmental damage should be held financially liable for preventing or remedying that damage. This regulation should encourage operators to adopt measures and develop practices aimed at minimising the risk of environmental damage to reduce their risk of being held financially liable.

The directive provides for a comprehensive liability regime for damage to the environment. In particular, it introduces a comprehensive regime for damage to valuable components of biodiversity (protected species and natural habitats), water and soil, as well as the services provided by these natural resources.



At regional level, each of Belgium's three regions has transposed the directive into its own regional legislation: Decree on Environmental Damage 17/07/2009 and Flemish Government Decree of 19/07/2013 (Environmental Damage Decree), Décret relatif à la responsabilité environnementale 11/04/2009, Ordinance on Environmental Liability 01/03/2012. At the federal level, Belgium has also adopted legislation that complements regional implementation. Federal legislation mainly focuses on issues related to cross-border environmental damage and specific industries, the Federal Environmental Responsibility Act 28 March 2007.

National laws on liability for damage caused by environmentally hazardous activities will therefore differ from the usual civil liability regime in that they will not cover the traditional range of damage (human health or property), but will cover damage to biodiversity and ecosystem services, as well as damage to soil or water. This will encourage stakeholders to take more precautions with regard to biodiversity

However, one of the biggest problems in implementing the directive is the assessment of biodiversity damage, which must consider the cost of restoration or the cost of alternative solutions if restoration is not possible.

This should be considered when transposing the European directive into national legislation.

TARGET 11: ENSURE COHERENT IMPLEMENTATION OF BIODIVERSITY-RELATED COMMITMENTS AND AGREEMENTS, AND BETWEEN THEM

There are six conventions on biodiversity at global level: the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar), the World Heritage Convention (WHC) and the Convention on Biodiversity beyond the Frontiers of National Jurisdiction (BBNJ).

Besides the CBD, two other Rio conventions (the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) are also relevant to biodiversity.

All these conventions overlap to some extent in terms of the requirements placed on Parties in terms of research, reporting, education and awareness-raising, the need for capacity-building, synthesis of scientific data, stakeholder engagement, and so on.

In addition to these international commitments and agreements, a number of regional conventions and agreements relevant to biodiversity also need to be implemented (Bern Convention, CEM, AEWA, EUROBATS, ASCOBANS, etc.).

The number of treaties and agreements highlights the need to create synergies in the national implementation of these obligations to ensure that they complement and reinforce each other. Stronger synergies at the national level will reduce duplication, avoid contradictions and enable more efficient use of available resources.

The players involved in the implementation of this objective are: the national focal points of the biodiversity conventions, the steering committees within the CCIM, the Directorate General for Development Cooperation (DGD), universities and any association pursuing the same objective as the NSB.

Operational objectives

11.1 Ensure coherent implementation of biodiversity agreements to which Belgium is a Party and avoid duplication, repetition or contradiction

The decisions of biodiversity-related conventions need to be implemented in a coherent and harmonised manner. To achieve this, Belgium first needs an overview of all decisions related to horizontal issues under the biodiversity conventions (such as deforestation, sustainable use of natural resources, inland waters, climate change, etc.). This overview will also allow the identification of mutually binding actions (projects can be designed jointly) and possible conflicting actions between the different biodiversity conventions.

A particularly relevant issue in this context is that of national reports. National reports are useful tools to assess the level of implementation of international agreements and to improve such implementation. However, reports rarely meet these objectives. Since national reporting for different conventions is mainly based on similar environmental data, it is important to streamline and harmonise the reporting processes between the different biodiversity-related conventions to enable countries to meet reporting requirements and avoid duplication of effort. Belgium could thus more easily meet the requirements of the Global Assessment of the Paris Agreement and the Global Review of the Global Framework for Biodiversity.

Moreover, there is a need to strengthen communication between national nodes of biodiversity conventions to ensure more coherent implementation of biodiversity commitments and maximise opportunities for synergies. This can be facilitated by existing institutional structures (such as the steering groups within the CCIEP), but it also means developing resources at the national level to improve coordination and cooperation among biodiversity treaty nodes in terms of planning, capacity building, research, reporting, information systems, etc.

11.2 All climate change, biodiversity and desertification cooperation projects funded by Belgium should be assessed to ensure that they are mutually supportive of the objectives of the three Rio Conventions

The three Rio conventions address a number of common substantive and procedural issues. An example is, measures to reduce the negative impacts of deforestation which are relevant to the implementation of all three conventions. Each of these conventions calls for capacity building, scientific and technical cooperation, the development of specific national plans and strategies, periodic reporting, etc.

The increasing impact of climate change on biodiversity and the consequences of certain actions to mitigate climate change may be relevant to the objectives of the CBD. On the other hand, biodiversity protection can contribute to climate change mitigation (healthy forests, peatlands and other habitats can reduce greenhouse gas concentrations by storing carbon) and can provide protection against natural disasters exacerbated by climate change.

Desertification also has a major impact on biodiversity. It reduces soil productivity, impacts the hydrological cycle and can lead to local extinction of wild species, etc.

It is important to check whether the projects launched by Belgium are in line with the objectives and recommendations of the three Rio conventions. Indeed, many projects related to climate change, biodiversity or desertification face challenges beyond those of a single-sector project. It is important to prevent and minimise the potential negative impacts of certain climate change mitigation measures (see operational objective 2.3). Therefore, Belgium should develop mechanisms to verify that projects launched under one of the Rio conventions meet the requirements of the other two. This verification could be extended to projects launched under other biodiversity-related conventions (CITES, CMS, etc.).

OBJECTIVE 12: STRENGTHEN BELGIUM'S INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TO PROTECT BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity conservation is a global task, and Belgium can contribute to biodiversity protection by strengthening cooperation and capacity-building programmes with other countries.

Biodiversity loss has serious consequences, especially for the world's poorest communities that are least resilient to these changes and directly depend on ecosystem services for their well-being and economic development. Intact ecosystems in protected areas play a crucial role in providing essential services such as drinking water, food security and disaster mitigation. Curbing biodiversity loss in developing countries is essential for poverty reduction and sustainable development, as these countries often host large areas of high biodiversity (UNEP-WCMC, 2018).

All partner countries of Belgian Development Cooperation have also signed the Convention on Biological Diversity and many other biodiversity-related agreements. Belgium will continue to support their efforts to comply with and implement their commitments under these conventions.

Enhancing and streamlining capacity building for biodiversity management is a *sine qua non* for developing countries to improve their scientific capacity



in the key areas of the Convention to achieve better implementation of the obligations imposed by the Convention. Belgium uses its scientific expertise in universities, institutes and NGOs to help developing countries, which are often rich in biodiversity but often lack the resources to implement them, to make progress in implementing the objectives of the Convention.

Efforts and initiatives have been recognised and implemented in Belgium in recent years, such as the implementation of the Capacities for Biodiversity and Sustainable Development (CEBioS) programme. Funded by the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGD) and implemented by the Institute of Natural Sciences, CEBioS helps partner countries of the Belgian Development Cooperation to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other international agreements related to the sustainable use, protection and conservation of biodiversity, especially in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Benin and Burundi. In particular, CEBioS works with Enabel and the Royal Museum for Central Africa, as part of a UNDP programme in Burundi. CEBioS manages a global taxonomy initiative to support taxonomy in the South (see Objective 8).

In addition, the SECORES Socio-Ecological Resilience Network, founded by 6 Belgian organisations, aims to integrate the concept of socio-ecological resilience into Belgian development cooperation. More specifically, the network wants to (a) strengthen knowledge on socio-ecological resilience; (b) improve the coherence of (Belgian) development policy; and (c) stimulate synergy around this theme.

Belgium's multilateral cooperation also offers many opportunities to increase support and, as a member of the boards of directors of the relevant international institutions, to include the need to transform the international financial system to make financial flows compatible with biodiversity targets in ongoing policy dialogue.

In recent years, Belgium has significantly increased its support for climate action in developing countries. It is important to particularly align these financial flows with the objectives of the K-M GBF. As a priority, Belgium's dedicated international climate action will mobilise funds for adaptation to the impacts of climate change to meet the needs of its

partner countries and their populations. Within this broader framework, the following priority areas were identified: (i) sustainable food systems, (ii) sustainable land use, biodiversity and ecosystems, and (iii) sustainable urban development.

The stakeholders involved in the implementation of this objective are: the federal and regional governments, universities, NGOs, institutions, etc. involved in research, environmental and/or development cooperation, the national focal point of CHM and any association pursuing the same objective as the NBS.

Operational objectives

12.1 Strengthening capacities of developing countries to support implementation of the Convention

As the climate and biodiversity crisis intensifies, it becomes urgent and essential to create a favourable context for capacity building in developing countries. As part of its development cooperation policy, Belgium should encourage capacity-building initiatives or projects to improve the sustainable use, conservation and restoration of biodiversity in developing countries.

Many timber-producing countries need financial, technical and legislative assistance to design and implement national programmes for the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests, develop good governance practices, review and implement forest regulations, land tenure and management systems, promote transparency, fight corruption and strengthen the participation of local and indigenous communities and the involvement of civil society, in order to lay the foundations for sustainable use of forest biodiversity.

Since many developing countries depend on the marine environment for food security, support for integrated coastal and marine programmes will greatly benefit partner countries and biodiversity. Integrated Coastal Management (ICM), also known as Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), has become the preferred approach for sustainable development and resource use in coastal areas. It

will be important to help the partner country develop the necessary knowledge and capacities (including those of relevant institutions) to create the appropriate environment for integrating marine and coastal biodiversity concerns into *ad hoc* sectoral plans.

Scientific and technical cooperation can be encouraged, in particular by facilitating access to biodiversity data stored in Belgian archives, transferring relevant technologies, encouraging the development and use of the CBD's Clearing House at the national level, and supporting the development of relevant ABS legislation. Belgian stakeholders are also encouraged to support this objective through appropriate educational and public awareness programmes, both in Belgium and in the developing country.

12.2 Provide access to an up-to-date overview of all cooperation and interregional projects supported by Belgium

Belgium cooperates with developing countries on a wide range of activities and is also involved in several interregional projects. Belgium already reports annually on all initiatives supported by the various governments in Belgium and their potential impact on biodiversity.

In addition, in line with Article 11, §2 of the Development Cooperation Act, Belgian Development Cooperation assesses whether environmental and sustainability criteria have actually been taken into account in cooperation projects.

12.3 Ensure that programmes and projects funded in development cooperation partner countries are pre-screened in line with international conventions and obligations to avoid or reduce potential negative impacts on biodiversity and encourage or enhance potential positive impacts. The screening to be applied is proportional and dependent on the projects and programmes concerned

In line with Article 11, §2 of the Development Cooperation Act, Belgian Development Cooperation integrates the protection of the environment and natural resources, including the fight against climate change, drought and global deforestation in all

its interventions. Within this framework, Belgian Development Cooperation screens programmes and projects for potential negative impacts on biodiversity to avoid or mitigate them, considering 'do not harm' approaches, and potential positive to encourage or enhance them. The screening to be applied is proportional and dependent on the projects and programmes concerned.

12.4 International coordination and effective exchange of information between *ex situ* conservation centres (zoos, botanical gardens)

Gene banks, zoos, nurseries, botanical gardens, aquaria, etc. contribute to *ex situ* conservation of wild plant and animal species of foreign origin by ensuring long-term conservation of species outside their natural habitat (*ex situ*).

For cultivated plant species and varieties and for domesticated animal breeds, *ex situ* conservation centres make it possible to maintain a large gene pool to ensure future viability and improvement of qualities. Based on scientific knowledge, *ex situ* conservation centres will be encouraged to preserve species, varieties and domesticated animal breeds in a way that ensures their conservation. Due to the wide diversity of collections, there is a need to strengthen coordination among *ex situ* conservation centres, for example by sharing information and facilitating access to foreign data for countries of origin, to ensure long-term conservation and facilitate access to information and collections.

TARGET 13: ENSURE ACTIVE AND EFFECTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN BIODIVERSITY-RELATED CONVENTIONS AND FORUMS AT INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN LEVEL

Biodiversity conservation is a common task that cannot be tackled by one country alone. In the international and European forums in which Belgium is represented, it will continue to actively emphasise the vital role of biodiversity for all policies and all sectors, and encourage international engagement.

By actively participating in international meetings and, if necessary, in various agencies and working groups, Belgium will work towards ambitious multi-lateral goals, objectives and actions. To ensure this participation, Belgium must speak with one voice,

which makes cooperation between the interregional and federal levels essential. Belgium also wants to contribute more to the financial and technical support needed to implement them.

Belgium will continue to play a leading role in various international and European forums to achieve ambitious goals for environmental conservation. In 2021, for example, Belgium initiated The Blue Leaders, an ambitious group of countries calling for urgent action to save the oceans from the climate crisis, overfishing, pollution and other threats.

Operational objectives

13.1 Promote cooperation and synergies between biodiversity-related conventions

As part of its participation in international agreements, Belgium will continue efforts to ensure the coherence of the provisions of biodiversity-related conventions to promote policy coherence, improve synergies and increase the effectiveness of implementation measures. Belgium will pay particular attention to creating a global partnership on biodiversity to improve implementation through enhanced cooperation among all conventions, organisations and agencies, and will continue to cooperate in harmonising and streamlining biodiversity reporting.

In recent years, significant synergies and partnerships have been developed between the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). These joint efforts aim to address the inter-related challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change, recognising the interdependencies and the need for integrated solutions.

13.2 Integrate biodiversity concerns into all international organisations and programmes relevant to biodiversity

Specific CBD issues are no doubt linked to discussions within other programme organisations such as UNEP, FAO, UNDP, WTO, WHO, WIPO, ITTO, etc. However, the relationships between the agreements directly relevant to biodiversity (see Annex 2) and the other relevant international organisations (see Annex 3) remain weak. It is therefore important

to strengthen synergies, cooperation and coherence at national, regional and international levels, given the positive impact that biodiversity protection can have on the implementation of several of these programmes.

Belgium will continue and strengthen its participation in international and European conventions, agreements and programmes related to biodiversity and will ensure that the positions taken are based on mutual interaction and that they support and respect the three objectives of the CBD. This stance promotes compatibility and mutual support among institutions and programmes. All this implies better coordination and information sharing at the national level to ensure that Belgian delegations at meetings of different but related bodies adopt coherent and mutually supportive positions.

13.3 Actively participate in the creation of new international conventions with a positive impact on biodiversity

Global problems often require global solutions. There is currently a global mobilisation at the international level to seek effective measures to protect biodiversity, as evidenced by the emergence of new international instruments dedicated to the matter. These instruments are likely to play a crucial role in biodiversity conservation once successfully implemented.

Belgium should be actively involved in the drafting and negotiation of these conventions, with the aim of ensuring coherence and consistency with existing biodiversity-related conventions and contributing to global efforts to safeguard the ecological richness of our planet.

In June 2023, the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea relating to the Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond the Limits of National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), also known as the “High Seas Convention”, was adopted. Briefly, this convention establishes a procedure for creating large-scale marine protected areas on the high seas. It sets out how to share the benefits of marine genetic resources and provides for capacity building and the transfer of marine technologies between Parties. It contains clear rules for carrying out

environmental impact assessments, with appropriate controls, prior to undertaking activities on the high seas and in the area.

TARGET 14: ENSURE FULL, FAIR, INCLUSIVE AND EFFECTIVE REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION OF DIVERSE COMMUNITIES IN BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND DECISION-MAKING

Enabling diverse communities (women, local communities, youth, etc.) to participate fully, equally and inclusively in biodiversity conservation is essential to meet global environmental challenges. This objective is in line with United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/76/300, which recognises the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right.

At the same time, inclusiveness in conservation decision-making ensures that policies and initiatives are tailored to the unique needs and concerns of different communities. This approach reduces the risk of inadvertently creating ready-made solutions that may not work for everyone. Effective conservation strategies often require context-specific approaches, and representation of diverse communities helps identify and implement these strategies. Empowering diverse communities also promotes a sense of ownership and management of their local ecosystems.

In Belgium, gender equality issues in the environmental sector are generally covered by laws and regulations that are part of the broader framework of laws on gender equality and non-discrimination. This means that the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination generally apply to all sectors, including the environmental sector. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Belgian Constitution and several laws have been passed over the years to strengthen equality.

It is essential to ensure full, fair, inclusive and effective participation of local communities in projects supported by ODA. This participation should primarily include minority or marginalised groups, such as indigenous peoples, youth, women, the elderly or persons with disabilities, to ensure that every voice is heard and that projects respond to the needs of all stakeholders. Belgian expertise combined with regional, national and local knowledge, including

local, indigenous and traditional knowledge, will lead to co-creation of sustainable and innovative solutions for biodiversity conservation.

Operational objective

14.1 Ensure gender equality through a gender-sensitive approach so that all women and girls have equal opportunities and capacities to contribute to the biodiversity conservation framework and decision-making

The gender-sensitive approach includes developing and implementing gender-sensitive policies at the national level and ensuring that they are respected in the context of biodiversity conservation. It also includes supporting women's leadership and participation in decision-making bodies related to biodiversity, such as environmental agencies, conservation organisations and other environmental projects. At the same time, it ensures that women have the opportunity to take on leadership roles in these contexts.

Achieving this objective will require investment in capacity-building programmes aimed at empowering women through training, education and access to opportunities to acquire skills and knowledge. This objective will enable the integration of gender considerations into all phases of biodiversity conservation initiatives: planning, implementation and evaluation.

Under the CBD, Parties are invited to designate and support a national focal point for gender and biodiversity. The responsibilities of designated focal points for gender and biodiversity may include supporting the national focal point of the CBD in the following areas:

- Respond to requests for contributions from the Conference of the Parties and the Secretariat on gender and biodiversity;
- Collaborate with other gender equality and biodiversity focal points to learn and share experiences and best practices to support the implementation of the K-M GBF and Gender Action Plan;
- To facilitate the development of gender and biodiversity expertise in the country to contribute to the implementation of the K-M GBF and the Gender Equality Action Plan; and

- Supporting the exchange of knowledge, sharing of experience and good practices, peer-to-peer learning, mentoring and coaching.

The appointment and implementation of a national focal point for gender and biodiversity in Belgium will be a step towards achieving this operational objective.

• CBD instruments

At COP15, Parties to the Convention adopted a Plan of Action on Gender Equality in the Annex to Decision 15/11. The purpose of this action plan is to support and promote the implementation of the K-M GBF, considering the gender dimension. The action plan will also support a gender-sensitive approach in the application of implementation mechanisms related to the overall framework. The plan contains three deliverables, including a set of indicative objectives and actions, the expected outcomes, and corresponding timelines.

14.2 Ensure the participation of young people in biodiversity conservation decisions and ensure their access to the necessary opportunities and resources

The collapse of biodiversity has dire consequences for many human rights recognised by the United Nations, as these rights are considered “inviolable”, meaning that future generations can claim them as much as those of today. It is therefore essential to ensure young people’s participation in biodiversity conservation and value their contributions to environmental policy. In Belgium, for example, a young UN biodiversity delegate is often part of the delegation, attends the COP of the CBD and participates to some extent in its preparation.

The achievement of objective 9.1 is directly linked to the implementation of this objective.

Several possible solutions can be considered. For example, the establishment of forums and workshops will give young people the opportunity to express their ideas and concerns about biodiversity, encouraging direct exchange with the relevant authorities. It is also important to set up mentoring programmes

that enable young people to work with conservation professionals, giving them the opportunity to gain experience and develop their network.

To achieve this objective, official youth organisations, such as the Youth Forum and the Flemish Youth Council, can provide support and guidance in implementing these initiatives.

TARGET 15: SIGNIFICANTLY AND GRADUALLY INCREASE MOBILISATION OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES FROM ALL SOURCES FOR BIODIVERSITY, INCLUDING NATIONAL, INTERNATIONAL, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RESOURCES, IN AN EFFICIENT AND EASILY ACCESSIBLE

Belgium is committed at international and European level to implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity. This includes financial support, both to adequately fund our own national efforts and to support developing countries in implementing the CBD.

Targets 15.1-15.7 of the updated NBS express this national and global commitment and should be seen in light of Article 20 of the CBD (§1-4), several subsequent COP decisions and Target 19 of the K-M GBF. Target 19 aims to generate additional investments from all sources to gradually close the biodiversity financing gap by at least US\$200 billion per year by 2030.

Resource mobilisation under the CBD is about increasing funding for biodiversity-related activities, both nationally and globally, to achieve the implementation of the K-M GBF, in line with Article 20 of the CBD. This objective is not only related to funding flows, but also to involving the private sector, reducing costs, improving sectoral integration, improving funding effectiveness (both nationally and in developing countries), etc. Consequently, relevant administrations and other actors have already taken - and still need to take - many actions to achieve objectives 15.1-15.7, in line with their own capacities and/or competences, and not limited to increasing net financial flows to third countries.

According to the study “Mapping and filling Belgium’s public funding gap for nature and biodiversity”, conducted by Trinomics for WWF-Belgium, the funding gap for biodiversity is estimated at €6.5 billion until 2030 to meet Belgium’s biodiversity commitments. This represents about 0.14% of Belgian GDP,

0.2% of current total public spending in Belgium and about 9% of current total spending on environmental protection in Belgium.

To ensure the success of this NBS, additional measures are needed in key areas. Investment in coherent and integrated biodiversity activities should be substantially increased. Funding should be supported by regional and federal environmental administrations, depending on their own capacities, and by other relevant administrations and funding bodies, including the private sector.

This objective is linked to operational objective 5.6, which requires that subsidies harmful to nature be redirected to initiatives beneficial to biodiversity. In this way, this target will also contribute to closing the funding gap needed for ecosystem conservation.

The stakeholders involved in implementing this objective are: the federal and regional governments responsible for finance, the economy, development cooperation and the environment, provincial and municipal governments, the private sector and markets, NGOs and any association working on the same lines as the NBS.

The Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN) Workbook 2018 is a UNDP-led global partnership working with countries on biodiversity finance. Thirty-six countries have already started the process. BIOFIN uses detailed country-level assessments to develop a biodiversity financing plan based on qualitative and quantitative data, innovative methodologies and expert input. It is an innovative, progressive and adaptable approach that enables countries to:

- 1) Assess the political, institutional and economic context of biodiversity financing and identify existing financing solutions;
- 2) Measure and analyse current spending on biodiversity by the public and private sectors, donors and non-governmental organisations;
- 3) Make a reliable estimate of the funding needed to meet a country's biodiversity targets and

compare this estimate with current spending on biodiversity and other available resources;

- 4) Develop a biodiversity financing plan that identifies and mobilises the resources and policies needed to implement the most appropriate financing solutions.

Operational objectives

15.1 Improve the effectiveness, efficiency and transparency of the delivery and use of funds

Significant amounts of Belgian public funding for biodiversity will be needed to meet the 2030 political ambition. The first step is to estimate the funding gap for biodiversity, i.e. the difference between the funding needs to meet the 2030 biodiversity targets and current nature-related spending. In Belgium, there are a number of obstacles to estimating the biodiversity funding gap. Several changes at federal and regional levels would make the assessment of biodiversity funding needs and the monitoring of current biodiversity spending more detailed and accurate.

First, there is an urgent need for more frequent, accurate and transparent monitoring and reporting of public funding for biodiversity, both in terms of national and international expenditure, especially in the context of cooperation projects. The Trinomics report points out that publicly available information on current expenditure, at a level of detail sufficient to track it, is currently completely lacking, apart from Official Development Aid (ODA). If possible, the introduction of common biodiversity expenditure reporting applicable to all federal and regional funding instruments would greatly facilitate the estimation of the biodiversity financial gap. However, regarding ODA reporting, it would have to be adapted for regional governments to their specific circumstances and context.

Second, the different Belgian authorities need to better understand and describe their 2030 biodiversity targets, in particular by defining the expected outcomes of the biodiversity targets, the activities planned to achieve these outcomes and the estimated budget for implementing these activities. Finally, the frequency of reporting on budgeted and actual

expenditure should be increased. This would improve the accuracy of the estimates.

15.2 Significantly and gradually increase the mobilisation of national resources, facilitated by the development and implementation of national biodiversity financing plans or similar instruments

Increasing overall national resources is an important part of the solution to close the biodiversity funding gap. Biodiversity authorities will need a new budget. Federal and regional authorities remain responsible for these issues and have the internal skills to implement them. A government-wide approach, and in particular the involvement of ministries of economy, finance and development, is crucial for the effective integration of biodiversity into their work.

The budget that provincial and municipal governments allocate for nature is already substantial, but their contributions could be even more substantial. A larger share of municipal taxes could be earmarked for local action in favour of biodiversity. Moreover, people associate more strongly with their local nature and are more willing to invest in it. As a result, willingness to pay for local biodiversity conservation is expected to become more natural. Another way forward is to develop urban greening plans for every city with more than 20,000 inhabitants (see Objective 3.5), largely self-financed by local governments, but with sufficient support from higher political levels.

The Global Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN) defines the Biodiversity Finance Plan as a tool to implement the most optimal financing solutions to achieve national biodiversity targets. The plan is a national document involving the public sector, the private sector and civil society organisations.

To ensure the success of financing strategies, it is essential that they are based on solid data, including positive spending on biodiversity within the national economy, identification of financial incentives that have a negative impact on nature and an accurate estimate of the financial needs to meet all national biodiversity targets.

15.3 Encourage private funding, promote blended funding, implement strategies to raise additional and new funds and encourage the private sector to invest in biodiversity

Biodiversity conservation cannot be achieved through public funding alone. It is necessary to mobilise private finance through regulatory frameworks, smart incentives and raising awareness of inclusive and sustainable business models. Financing for conservation is a vastly underdeveloped market and has a key role to play in the transition to better risk management for biodiversity. There are opportunities to fund projects that contribute to the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The problem is that private investment is not reaching the scale needed to solve the systemic problems associated with biodiversity financing. There is a need to improve the ability of projects to generate funds and build a track record for new business models.

The new BIOFIN database can serve as an inspiring initiative to link nature and biodiversity projects with investors from public and private funds. It facilitates the efficient allocation of financial resources for biodiversity conservation and restoration. The BIOFIN database “The Finance Resource Database for Biodiversity (FIRE)” helps bridge the funding gap for biodiversity conservation by listing more than 300 funding opportunities worldwide. The sources listed are both public and private. FIRE works as a one-stop shop, where a project owner can find in one place a wide variety of opportunities matching specific criteria (country, funding scope, entity type, etc.).

Another way to mobilise private funding for biodiversity is to divert money flows from projects that have a negative impact on biodiversity and ecosystems.

15.4 Encourage transformation to reduce financing needs

The main purpose of public funding for biodiversity is to protect ecosystems from harmful pressures, often driven by private interests, and to support or restore these ecosystems where protection and conservation have been inadequate. Consequently, the key to reducing the overall financial burden lies in alleviating these ecological pressures, which often requires long-term systemic societal changes beyond the reach of public funding. Nevertheless, it is essential to emphasise the role of government in steering development towards more nature-friendly paths, so as to avoid

unsustainable demands on public funds for biodiversity conservation. There is also a need for enforcement of existing laws that improve essential conditions for a healthy natural environment, and a more proactive stance to ensure faster implementation of European and national/regional regulations. Moreover, the “user pays” and “polluter pays” principles should be better applied through sectoral policies. Legislative and regulatory reforms that remove perverse incentives and reduce the impact of economic activity on biodiversity are therefore essential.

Understanding the true value of nature and its benefits to our societies and economies is essential if we are to move towards more sustainable use of our planet’s resources and halt the decline of biodiversity and ecosystems. Research on the economic value of ecosystems has highlighted the different ways in which nature contributes to our well-being and generated interest in nature-based solutions to key societal challenges. This understanding is essential for a number of reasons; it allows us to understand the full social and economic costs associated with the disappearance of ecosystems and biodiversity, including the costs of replacing the functions they provided for free before they disappeared. Understanding the value of nature can help assess policies, measures and projects in terms of economic, environmental and social impacts and trade-offs, and provide the basis for a more informed choice between competing interventions.

It also makes it possible to assess the benefits of ecosystem protection and restoration, which is essential for effective action and fund mobilisation. Although progress has been made in assessing the

value of nature, its full integration into public and private decision-making processes is still lacking. Yet integrating the value of ecosystem services into decision-making can catalyse transformative actions on biodiversity and create an effective policy framework that protects the natural world, both in Belgium and around the world.

Improving our understanding of the state and value of nature is only part of the challenge. It is equally necessary to seamlessly integrate biodiversity into key aspects of governance, economic planning and fiscal policy. This operational objective is closely linked to Objective 5 of this strategy, which focuses on integrating biodiversity into sectoral policies. Innovative approaches such as the implementation of payments for ecosystem services, the issuance of green bonds, the creation of biodiversity offsets and credits, and the introduction of benefit-sharing mechanisms should be encouraged, all of which should incorporate strict environmental and social safeguards.

However, mechanisms for biodiversity offsets and credits, like carbon offsets and credits, may have shortcomings. This financial innovation must be accompanied by environmental integrity and strong governance, especially in countries with indigenous peoples and local communities, to ensure that these efforts respect and use a rights-based approach that reflects their role as stewards of nature. It is essential to ensure that lessons learned from the carbon market are carried over to a future biodiversity credit market, without diverting attention from the need for global systemic change. It is essential to prioritise transformational change by addressing the root causes of biodiversity loss.

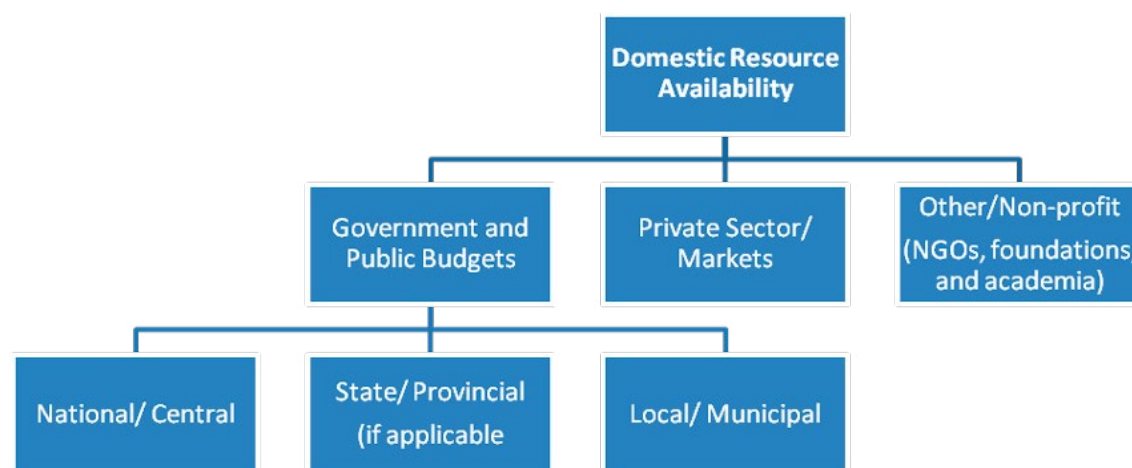


Figure 4. Source of domestic funding for biodiversity (Source: UNEP/CBD/COP/11/14/ADD1)

For example, the United Nations has developed a framework, the System of Environmental and Economic Accounting (SEEA), which integrates economic and environmental data to provide a more comprehensive and multifaceted picture of the interrelationships between the economy and the environment, and of stocks and changes in stocks of environmental resources.

In Belgium, the main source of revenue from environmental taxes comes from taxes on transport and energy, and only a small fraction from taxes on pollution or resource use, which are particularly important for nature and biodiversity. There is a need to rebalance the Belgian tax burden, focusing more on pollution and resource use than on labour.

Better use of tax incentives could also contribute to this operational objective. Instead of encouraging and rewarding biodiversity actions through public spending, this could also be done by reducing the tax burden on key stakeholders responsible for implementation - for example, NGOs that acquire and manage nature reserves. Belgian nature conservation authorities are already implementing such measures. For example, the Flemish government offers nature managers various reductions in inheritance tax, gift tax, turnover tax and property tax depending on the level of ambition of their nature management³⁴, while Wallonia grants exemptions from property tax,

inheritance tax and gift tax to landowners in Natura 2000 sites.³⁵

15.5 Make best use of existing EU financial instruments to promote biodiversity

The LIFE programme, the EU's financial instrument for the environment and climate change, has so far been relatively well used by Belgium for nature and biodiversity projects. The LIFE Nature and Biodiversity sub-programme will continue to fund nature conservation projects. These are in particular projects that contribute to the implementation of the Natura 2000 network and legislation on invasive alien species, and help achieve the targets of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030. Larger projects targeting strategic and nature integration goals are now also supported by the programme.

The EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 included a number of specific investment commitments in response to the growing need for public funding to achieve EU biodiversity targets. For example, 30% of the EU climate action budget is to be invested in nature-based solutions with climate benefits. In addition, the EU's ambition is to spend 7.5% of the EU's 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework on biodiversity from 2024 and 10% from 2026. It is vital that EU funding for biodiversity matches the targets set for it.

Belgium can play an important role by supporting a specific fund for biodiversity conservation and restoration in the next multiannual financial framework (2027-2033), by strengthening the integration

³⁴ Agency for Nature & Forests web page on Subsidies, benefits and commitments (in Dutch): <https://natuurenbos.vlaanderen.be/natuurbeheerplannen/subsidies-voordelen-en-committments#:~:text=Fiscal%20benefits%3A%20overview&text=Since%201%20January%202022%20is%20valid,two%20or%20three%20is%20approved.>

³⁵ SPW Wallonie web page on fiscal advantages for biodiversity,

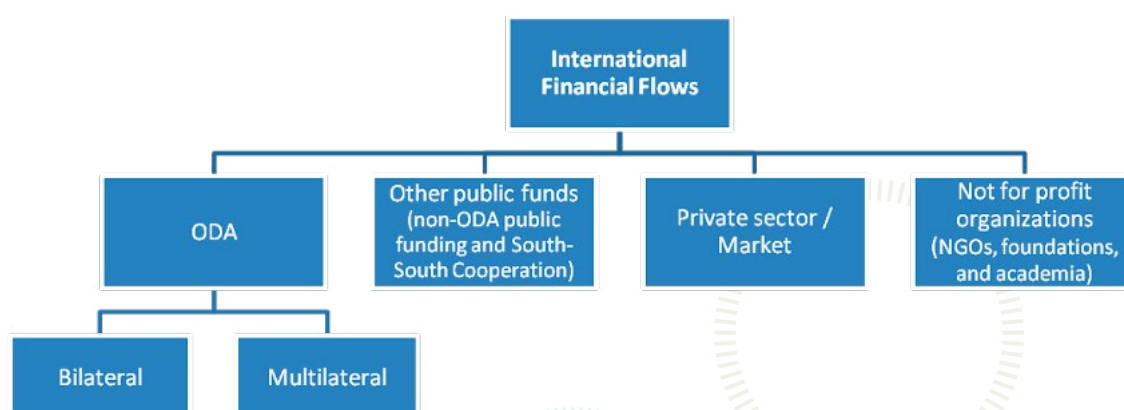


Figure 5. Types of international financial flows (Source: UNEP/CBD/COP/11/14/ADD1)

of biodiversity in all EU funding programmes and by preventing EU funds from financing investments that harm biodiversity.

15.6 Increase the total amount of international funding from developed countries for biodiversity, including ODA

The justification for this type of target lies in Article 20 of the CBD, paragraphs 1 to 4. Through numerous COP decisions, Parties have decided to set targets for the renewal of their commitments under Article 20 of the CBD, Aichi target 20 (COP-11/4, §7), K-M GBF target 19(a).

Target 19(a) of the K-M GBF calls for *“Increasing the total amount of biodiversity-related international financial resources from developed countries, including official development assistance, and from countries that voluntarily meet the obligations of developed country Parties, to developing countries, particularly least developed countries and small island developing states, as well as countries with transitional economies, to at least US\$20 billion per year by 2025, and to at least US\$30 billion per year by 2030;”*

International flows of financial resources come from different sources (see Figure 5). Official development assistance (ODA) is provided by governments to improve economic development and living standards in developing countries. It can be bilateral (directly from a donor country to a recipient country) or multilateral (funds provided through international financial institutions and the United Nations, its funds and programmes). International financial flows can also include non-ODA government funding, such as economic cooperation, through private companies and international non-profit organisations. This can be North-South or South-South cooperation.

The first step for Belgium is to adopt a methodology to calculate its baseline for international financial flows dedicated to the implementation of the CBD and biodiversity-related activities in developing countries. Once the baseline is known, a strategy to fulfil the commitment will be developed in cooperation with relevant stakeholders (federal and regional governments, the private sector, NGOs, foundations and universities).

In the context of this process, the expression “biodiversity-related activity” refers to all activities that have a positive impact on biodiversity, be it direct or indirect benefits. The CBD reporting framework proposes a categorisation of biodiversity-related resources to help Parties account for the different types of information that can be considered.

As part of this objective, Belgium will provide support to strengthen existing financial institutions and encourage the replication and scaling-up of successful financial mechanisms and instruments. These initiatives could take the form of stepping up efforts to mobilise sources of co-financing and other resources to finance biodiversity projects or to promote biodiversity in debt relief and swap initiatives, including debt-for-environment swaps. The development and implementation of economic incentives can be seen as supporting the three objectives of the Convention at local and national levels and as consistent and coherent with other relevant international commitments.

15.7 Ensure funding for biodiversity, within and subject to available development cooperation budgets and taking into account the importance of the climate-biodiversity nexus, where recognised as a priority by the countries concerned.

This objective was already included in the CBD COP 9/11 resource mobilisation strategy (§6) and was reiterated in paragraph 14 of decision COP-11/4 and paragraph 10 of decision COP-15/7 with a view to creating conditions conducive to mobilising private and public sector investment in biodiversity and associated ecosystem services.

This objective is essential to achieve the objectives of the CBD, as the amount of funding, management and absorption capacity of recipient countries are all crucial factors in this context.

As part of its bilateral and multilateral interactions with partner countries, Belgium will, among other things

Support institutional capacity building for effective resource mobilisation and use, including capacity building of relevant ministries and agencies to include biodiversity and associated ecosystem services in discussions with donors and relevant financial institutions;

Support strengthening the capacity to integrate biodiversity issues and associated ecosystem services into national and sectoral planning efforts and promote budget allocations for biodiversity and associated ecosystem services in relevant national and sectoral budgets;

Ensure funding for biodiversity, within and subject to available development cooperation budgets and taking into account the importance of the climate-biodiversity nexus, where this is recognised as a priority by the countries concerned.

This requires the commitment of countries that ratified the CBD (the “Parties”) to this approach. Integrating biodiversity into poverty reduction and national development strategies is essential, as the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources are key elements in fighting poverty and promoting development. Such support will also need to be aligned with development assistance efforts supported by international organisations such as the United Nations and other aid initiatives. Finally, it is crucial that any increase in this support be consistent with the priorities set out in national biodiversity strategies and action plans to ensure that resources are used effectively.



Part V: Monitoring the strategy

V.1 Governance

When implementing the NBS, special attention will be paid to informing, involving and participating with stakeholders. This implies consultation and cooperation among the various stakeholders, which will strengthen support for and thus implementation of the Belgian National Biodiversity Strategy. Working with stakeholders on concrete projects linked to priority targets within the Strategy framework will raise their awareness. At the same time, it is essential that government agencies responsible for implementation use the right tools and have sufficient knowledge of biodiversity and related issues.

It is essential that Belgium's national biodiversity strategy is taken into account and considered at the decision-making and environmental planning levels.

V.2 Follow-up and support mechanisms

SM1. By the end of 2025, establish, implement and publish indicators to measure progress against NBS strategic objectives.

Stakeholders: federal and regional governments, the CBD Steering Group with its experts, and NGOs.

Implementation of the strategy and progress towards the 2030 target will be monitored and evaluated using at least the headline indicators and binary indicators of the K-M GBF monitoring framework to make recommendations for further necessary action. Each national target will be associated with at least one corresponding overall indicator, where such an indicator exists. These indicators may be complemented by additional indicators such as component indicators and supplementary indicators to refine understanding of results. The monitoring mechanism will be set up after the approval of the NBS and will be coordinated within the CBD Steering Group, in collaboration with the relevant authorities.

These performance indicators will be used for future national reports to the CBD.

SM2. Maintain and develop the CHM website by 2025.

Stakeholders: National Focal Point CHM, federal and regional governments, CBD Steering Group

The Belgian CHM has put a reporting module on the Aichi targets on its website, as it facilitates sharing and accessing information on the Aichi targets. The CBD Secretariat has been working on updating this module to report on the K-M GBF targets. The integration of this latest update will help develop an information system on objectives and targets.

The integration of this latest update enables reporting on the implementation of K-M GBF, the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the National Strategy. The information in the tool will be periodically updated based on the results of the SM1 modules.

SM3. By 2025, establish a functional sharing mechanism for the Convention and its protocols, including a network of practitioners.

Stakeholders: The national focal points of CHM, BCH and ABS-CH, the federal and regional governments, the CBD Steering Group, the national focal point of CBD, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform, universities, nature agencies, NGOs, the public and private sectors.

Everyone involved in implementing the NBS has a huge amount of experience and has developed many useful case studies, tools and guidelines. However, there is even more useful information outside this community. The CHM Global Work Programme calls on Parties to develop a biodiversity knowledge network, consisting of a database and a network of practitioners, with the aim of bringing together this knowledge and experience and making it available through the CHM Clearinghouse to facilitate and support better implementation of the CBD (including the many national biodiversity programmes, strategies and action plans). It also calls for the

establishment of a permanent national clearinghouse so that in each of the Parties, everyone has access to the information, expertise and experience essential for the implementation of the CBD. National CHMs should also be linked to the central CHM managed by the Convention Secretariat, and the exchange of information between these different mechanisms should be facilitated.

The national CHM should be adapted and able to play its role for the K-M GBF. It should be actively used by biodiversity stakeholders. It should be actively used by the biodiversity community in Belgium to add and update information relevant to monitor the implementation of the national strategy. Regional information on biodiversity and Convention implementation should be linked to the national CMB, if available on a regional website, or published on the national CMB website by the relevant region if there is no dedicated website.

Belgium's partnership role in CHM should continue to help national CHMs in developing countries and elsewhere to expand the user community and its networks.

SM4. By 2025, establish functional clearing houses to implement and transfer technologies to support the CBD and its protocols (BCH, ABS CH).

Stakeholders: CHM, ABS and BCH focal points, federal and regional governments

The CBD requires States Parties to establish a National Clearing Mechanism (CHM) to enable the exchange of biodiversity information and scientific and technical cooperation. At COP-10, the mandate of the CHM was expanded and it should also be a tool for monitoring the implementation of national strategies and action plans. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety established a Biosafety Clearing House (BCH) to assist Parties in implementing the Protocol and to facilitate the exchange of scientific, technical, environmental and legal information and experience on genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) also provides for the establishment of an ABS CH. At the federal level, the national ABS CH is integrated into the CHM as a special component.

Belgium will ensure that the various CHMs are functional and comply with their mandates under the Convention and Protocols. As biodiversity is mainly a regional competence in Belgium, a cooperation model should be established with the regions to involve them in the responsibilities of the CHMs.

Since the entry into force of the Convention, capacity building and development and technology transfer activities have been carried out by various Belgian stakeholders at the request of partners from developing and other countries. The national CHM, in collaboration with the BCH and the Belgian Biodiversity Platform, will develop a special section on the website to highlight the biodiversity capacity-building and technology development and transfer activities that have taken place. The regions also have a wealth of experience in this area through the various academic networks, such as VLIR-UOS, and should report on this through regional CHMs or could add this information to the national CHM. This information could be used as a source of information for stakeholders looking for capacity building on biodiversity, development and technology. The Convention Secretariat was asked to collect information on capacity building and development, technology transfer and the needs of Parties by Decision 15/8, Articles 11 to 13. Belgium should ensure that information on technology transfer is included in national CHMs. Belgium should ensure that information on technology transfer by Belgian stakeholders is regularly exchanged with the Secretariat. Requests from Parties on technology transfer will be sent to the CHM and to stakeholders.

V.3 Duration, reporting, assessment and review

Initially, the duration of the first national strategy was 10 years, until 2016. The conclusions of the mid-term review of the strategy (2012) recommended updating the text. It was decided to align the targets and duration of the strategy with the 2020 Aichi targets and the 2020 EU Biodiversity Strategy.

With the recent adoption of a new EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and the K-M GBF, the ICL decided in March 2023 to task the Biodiversity Convention

Steering Committee, in collaboration with the Nature Steering Committee, with updating and aligning the national strategy with the EU and global 2030 targets.

Implementation of the strategy is monitored using the indicators in CMB's K-M-GBF monitoring framework, in particular the main indicators and the binary indicators (see SM1).

The assessment will cover both environmental and socio-economic impacts. The assessment and report on progress made and obstacles to implementation of the national biodiversity strategy will be available on the CHM website and published every four years as part of the national reporting process for the CBD. This will enable the Convention on Biological Diversity Steering Committee to assess the effectiveness of measures taken and identify priorities to guide future actions.

The next reports, the seventh and eighth national reports, respectively, should assess the progress made in implementing the K-M GBF, including the progress made in achieving the national targets of the National Biodiversity Strategy. The seventh and eighth national reports are due on 28 February 2026 and 30 June 2029, respectively. The 7th national report will include an assessment of progress made in implementing the NBS between 2013 and 2025.

Once the NBS is adopted, it is essential to ensure that the federal, regional and community governments take the necessary steps to implement it and evaluate its effectiveness. Progress towards the 2030 target and the objectives of the NBS should be reviewed periodically so that the strategy can be adjusted and strengthened.

List of abbreviations

ABS	Access and Benefit Sharing
ABSCH	Access and Benefit-Sharing Clearing-House
AEWA	African-Eurasian Migratory waterbird Agreement
ANB	Agentschap voor Natuur en Bos
ASCOBANS	Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas
BBNJ	Biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction
GDP	Gross domestic product
CCIM	Coordinating Committee on International Environmental Policy
CEM	collaborative environmental management
CHM	Clearing House Mechanism
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CMS	Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
COP	Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity
CSRD	Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive
DEMNA	Département de l'Étude du milieu naturel et agricole
DNF	Département de la Nature et des Forêts
DSI	digitalised sequence information on genetic resources
EBV	essential biodiversity variable
EEC	European Economic Community
EEA	European Economic Area
EMA	European Medicines Agency
EMAS	Eco-Management and Audit Scheme
EU	European Union
EUFORGEN	European forest genetic resources programme
EUROBATS	Agreement on the conservation of populations of European bats
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FEEDIS	feeding information system
FOEN	Swiss Federal Office for the Environment
FPDO	federal plan for sustainable development
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GBIF	Global Biodiversity Information Facility
GBO	Global Biodiversity Outlook
GMO	Genetically Modified Organism
CAP	common agricultural policy
GPDO	The Regional Plan for Sustainable Development
GPPR	Regional Pesticide Reduction Programme
GR	genetic resources
GTI	Global Taxonomic Initiative
CFP	common fisheries policy
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IAS	Invasive Alien Species
ICL	Interministerial Conference for the Environment
IEA	International Energy Agency



ILCs	Indigenous and Local Communities
ILVO	Institute for Agricultural, Fisheries and Food Research
INBO	Institute for Nature and Forest Research
IPBES	Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPEN	International Plant Exchange NEtwork
ITPGRFA	International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
ITTO	International Tropical Timber Organization
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural resources
IWC	International Whaling Commission
RBINS	Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences
K-M GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
KMR	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
KRMS	European Marine Strategy Framework Directive
LEKP	Local energy and climate pact
LPI	Living Planet Index
MAP	manure action plan
MEA	multilateral environmental agreement
EIA	environmental impact assessment
MOSAICC	International code of conduct for the sustainable use of micro-organisms and the regulation of access
MPA	Marine Protected Areas, coastal or marine protected area
MRP	Marine spatial plan
MSP	multi-stakeholder process
NAPAN	National Action Plan d'Action National
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NBS	National Biodiversity Strategy
NCP	Nature's Contribution to People.
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NGT-	new genetic technique
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSPAR	Convention for the protection of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic
PAN	Programmatic Approach to Nitrogen
PAS	Programmatic Approach to Nitrogen
PEFC	Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes
S-BRV	Strategic Vision Policy Plan Space Flanders
SDG	Sustainable development goal
SEBI	Streamlining European Biodiversity Indicators
SECORES	Belgian Network for Social-Ecological Resilience
SFDR	Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation
SFM	Sustainability Forest Management
SEA	strategic environmental assessment
TAC	Total Allowable Catch
TNFD	Taskforce on nature-related financial disclosure
TRIPS	Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights

UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNECE	European Economic Commission of the United Nations
UNEP	UN Environment Programme
UNEP-WCMC	UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VAP	Flemish adaptation plan
CBD	Convention on Biodiversity
VSDO	Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development
WEF	World Economic Forum
WHC	world heritage convention
WHO	World Health Organization
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WTO	World Trade Organisation
WWF	World Wildlife Fund



Glossary

No net loss: the concept of no net loss means that the conservation/loss of biodiversity in an area, geographically or otherwise defined, is compensated by a gain elsewhere, provided that this principle does not lead to a modification of existing biodiversity as protected by EU nature legislation.

Bioregional approach: approach at the scale of a bioregion, considered as a territory defined by a set of biological, social and geographical criteria rather than from a geopolitical perspective; a bioregion is generally a system of interconnected ecosystems.

Biofuels: are transport fuels produced from raw materials derived from biomass (i.e. organic material).

Agricultural biodiversity: an umbrella term that includes all components of biodiversity that are important for food and agriculture, as well as all components of biodiversity that make up the agricultural ecosystem: the variety and variability of animals, plants and micro-organisms, at genetic, species and ecosystem levels, that are needed to support important functions, structure and processes of agricultural ecosystems.

Biomanipulation (of lakes): technique to restore (lakes) through “top-down” management, mainly by reducing and/or restructuring fish populations, to encourage grazing by herbivorous zooplankton to control phytoplankton biomass and consequently achieve and maintain a clear water system with high species richness.

Biomass includes non-food products extracted from plants, algae, animals or fungi for various applications. Biomass plays an important role as a feedstock for renewable energy production (electricity, heating and cooling or transport fuels), but also as a raw material for other applications.

Biotechnology: any technological application that uses biological systems, living organisms or their derivatives, to make or modify products or processes for specific applications and purposes. The scope of biotechnology is vast: it ranges from “traditional” processes such as brewing beer and making yoghurt (fermentation), through microbiological processes that are improved simply by natural selection, such as the synthesis of a natural material, to genetic modification by methods that could not arise naturally.

Good status: Refers to areas of a habitat type, a condition in which the essential characteristics of the habitat type, in particular its structure, function and typical species composition, reflect the high level of ecological integrity, stability and resilience required to ensure its long-term conservation, thus contributing to achieving or maintaining a favourable conservation status.

Good Environmental Status (GES) the environmental status of marine waters where they provide ecologically diverse and dynamic oceans and seas that are clean, healthy and productive within their intrinsic conditions, and where the use of the marine environment is at a sustainable level, safeguarding the potential for uses and activities for current and future generations (Article 3 of EU Directive 2008/56/EC).

Mutually agreed terms: The CBD (Article 15(4)) states that “Access, if granted, shall be governed by mutually agreed terms...”. This means there must be an agreement - formal or informal - that is acceptable to both the country or group giving access to its genetic resources and the group seeking access to those resources.

Prior Informed Consent: holders of knowledge or resources must be informed of the reason for collecting or using their knowledge or biodiversity and their consent must be obtained before the activity takes place.

Ex situ conservation: The conservation of components of biodiversity outside their natural habitat.

In situ conservation: the conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats as well as the maintenance and re-constitution of viable populations of species in their natural environment.

Cryobank: A storage facility maintained at very low temperature to preserve seeds or other genetic material.

Biological diversity (biodiversity): The variability among living organisms from all sources, including, among others, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.

Ecosystem: a dynamic complex of communities of plants, animals and micro-organisms and their non-living environment interacting as a functional unit.

Ecotourism: tourism activity aimed at discovering protected or preserved natural areas while respecting local people, heritage and protecting the environment (sustainable tourism). The concept of ecotourism is generally misunderstood and in practice is often simply used as a marketing tool to promote nature tourism.

Ecological footprint: The ecological footprint corresponds to the area on earth needed to meet the consumption needs of a group of people or an individual, depending on the lifestyle of the group or individual in question.

Environmental impact assessment (EIA): a process designed to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of a proposed plan or programme, taking into account its socio-economic, cultural and human health implications, whether beneficial or adverse.

Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) is the formal, systematic and comprehensive process for identifying and evaluating the environmental impacts of proposed policies, plans or programmes to ensure that they are fully integrated and adequately addressed at the earliest possible stage of decision-making, on an equal footing with economic and social considerations. Strategic environmental assessment covers a wider range of activities, a larger area and often over a longer period of time than strategic environmental assessment.

Often over a longer period than the environmental assessment of projects.

Species: A group of mutually reproducing organisms that are reproductively isolated from all other organisms, although there are many partial exceptions to this rule in certain taxa.

Flagship species: Species that attract public attention and have other characteristics that make them suitable for communicating conservation concerns.

Gene: Functional unit of heredity; part of the DNA molecule encoding a single enzyme or structural protein unit.

Adaptive management: a form of management that recognises the complex and dynamic nature of ecosystems and their uses, and the lack of full knowledge of how they function. Given the changing conditions and uncertainties inherent in any use of biodiversity components, adaptive management can respond to uncertainties and includes elements of “learning by doing” or feedback from research. Monitoring is a key element of adaptive management. The concept is developed in document UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/9/INF/8 (2003).

Green infrastructure is defined as a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas, with different environmental characteristics, designed and managed to provide a wide range of ecosystem services.

Introgression: the introduction of genes from the genetic heritage of one species into that of another during hybridisation.



Fallow land: a plot of land withdrawn from agricultural production - arable, horticultural or livestock production, including grazing - for a specified period of time.

Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC): a management procedure for recreational resources. It is a series of linked steps aimed at developing a set of measurable objectives that define the desired conditions for the natural area. The planning process also identifies the management actions needed to maintain or achieve these conditions.

Other Effective area-based Conservation Measure (OECM) is a geographically defined area that is not a protected area and is governed and managed to achieve positive and sustainable long-term outcomes for *in situ* conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and, where applicable, locally relevant cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other values (CBD, 2018).

Sustainable use is the use of components of biological diversity in a manner and at a rate that does not lead to the long-term degradation of biological diversity, thereby preserving its potential to meet the needs and desires of present and future generations (CBD, 1992).

Nature-based solutions (NBS) are actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems that respond effectively and adaptively to social, economic and environmental challenges, while securing human well-being, ecosystem services, resilience and biodiversity benefits (UNEA Resolution 5). There are other definitions of SfN.

A protected area is a geographically defined area designated or regulated and managed to achieve specific conservation objectives (CBD, 1992).

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The background of the page is a photograph of three birds, likely swans or geese, in flight against a dramatic, orange-hued sunset sky. The birds are silhouetted against the bright light of the setting sun. A large, white, semi-circular graphic element is positioned on the right side of the page, partially overlapping the sunset image. The word "ANNEXES" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font within this white circle.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Biodiversity actors in Belgium

Every level of the Belgian government, whether federal, regional, community or local, is responsible for biodiversity issues. Yet the competences for biodiversity lie mainly with the three regions: Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels. Many different actors actively participate in the implementation of the Strategy: ministries and administrations, advisory and consultative bodies, research institutions, NGOs, information centres, individuals and community groups,...

The Belgian Exchange Web site will provide an overview of the responsibilities and contact details of key biodiversity actors in Belgium (<http://www.biodiv.be>). In this annex, we focus on (1) ministries and administrations, (2) advisory and consultative bodies and (3) research institutions.

1.1. MINISTRIES AND ADMINISTRATIONS

Flemish Region:

All services of the Flemish Region and the Flemish Community are brought together in a single ministry consisting of several departments, divided into administrations and divisions.

The tasks and competences of the Flemish Region and the Flemish Community are divided into 13 policy domains. The implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) falls mainly under the **Environment, Nature and Energy (LNE)** policy domain. The LNE Department plays a central role: it coordinates the preparation and reporting of Flemish environmental policy and the management and monitoring of its implementation.

Within the Ministry for Environment, Nature and Energy, the following departments are relevant to the implementation of the CBD:

- the **Department of Environment, Nature and Energy**, which deals with, among other things:
- **international environmental policy** (coordination of Flemish international environmental policy), **environmental, nature and energy policy**

(coordinating policy preparation, evaluation and argumentation), environmental permits (including GMO restricted use permits)

- **Agency for Nature and Forest (ANB)**: this agency is responsible for the legal framework regarding protection, conservation measures, communication and cooperation regarding nature, forests and green spaces. This agency promotes sustainable forest management and is responsible for strengthening nature, forests and public green spaces in Flanders. It manages the green areas of the Flemish Region and its partners and is responsible for issuing permits and exemptions and for enforcing regulations on the protection of habitats and species.
- the **Institute for Nature and Forest Research (INBO)**: this institute carries out scientific research on the status and trends of biodiversity, and on the development and sustainable use of nature and forests.

In addition, there are three public bodies, each dealing with one specific environmental theme: the Flemish Land Agency (VLM) for land use planning, the Flemish Environment Agency (VMM) for monitoring surface water and air quality, and the Public Waste Agency for the Flemish Region (OVAM) which is responsible for the prevention and management of waste, soil and pollution.

In addition to the environmental administrations mentioned above, there are also many other administrations and departments that play a role in biodiversity conservation in Belgium', for example for transport, fisheries and agriculture, spatial planning,

Walloon Region:

In the Walloon Region, the **Directorate-General for Agriculture, Natural Resources and the Environment (D GARNE)** of the Ministry of the Walloon Region is responsible for nature conservation, the environment (especially waste), soil management and protection, and the exploitation of natural resources such as water and forests in the Walloon Region. Within the D GARNE, several administrative departments are responsible for the various tasks:

- **Department of Nature and Forests**. This department is in charge of the ecological management

of the natural environment, including the Walloon forests. It also initiates innovative nature protection projects outside protected areas (e.g. ecological management of roadsides) and grants subsidies to encourage actions that restore biodiversity (e.g. planting hedgerows). Four directorates oversee the implementation of the above-mentioned task: the Directorate for General Affairs, the Directorate for Forest Resources, the Directorate for Nature and the Directorate for Hunting and River Fishing.

- **Department of Licences and Permits** (including issuing permits for restricted use of GMOs)
- **Walloon -Waste Service.** This service is committed to the prevention, valorisation and disposal of waste in order to protect the environment.
- **Directorate Water.** This department works on implementation of the Water Framework Directive, river agreements, restoration of aquatic habitats and riverbanks, among others.
- **Directorate of Environmental Policy.** This department investigates criminal environmental offences and monitors the state of the environment (using indicators).
- Scientific support is provided by DEMNA
- **Department of Rural Affairs and Watercourses.** This deals with agri-environmental measures.
- Scientific support is also provided through research agreements with various universities.

In addition to the above-mentioned institutions, several other departments and ministries also play a role in the conservation of biodiversity in Belgium, e.g. the 'Direction générale opérationnelle Aménagement du territoire, Logement, Patrimoine et Energie (the Operational Directorate-General for Spatial Planning, Housing, Heritage and Energy) (for spatial planning) the Permanent Conference on Territorial Development (CPDT), the Direction générale opérationnelle de la Mobilité et des Voies hydrauliques (Operational Directorate-General for Mobility and Waterways) (responsible for road tunnels, tunnels for otters, fish ladders, management of the 'RaVeL' network).

Brussels Capital Region:

The environmental powers of the Brussels Capital Region are vested in the **Brussels Institute for Environmental Management (IBGE)**, a pararegional institution that acts as the region's environmental administration. Since its creation in 1989, the IBGE has become an important mouthpiece for residents on all environmental issues such as air, green spaces, waste, water, soil pollution. The Institute collects and analyses environmental data, disseminates information, gives advice and draws up action plans, defines strategies and is involved in fieldwork, promotes environmental awareness. Within the Brussels Institute for Environmental Management, it is the Green Spaces Department that manages public green spaces (parks, forests, semi-natural areas and nature reserves), develops the blue and green network and is responsible for the Region's biodiversity (inventory, monitoring, strategy, management, etc.).

Besides IBGE, the Brussels administration also has a **Department of Monuments and Sites**, which manages 'heritage' files and implements the Brussels government's policies in these areas. Among other things, this department is responsible for classifying monuments of architectural value and also plays a role in the field of biodiversity.

There are also several other departments that play a role in biodiversity conservation in Brussels, for example, for transport: Administration for Equipment and Transport (BUV); for spatial planning: Administration for Spatial Planning and Housing (BROH).

Federal level:

The main federal government departments that play a role in achieving the Treaty's objectives are:

Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment: The Directorate-General for the Environment, through the Coordinating Committee on International Environmental Policy (CCIEP), coordinates the positions of the different (federal and regional) administrations to arrive at a joint national position. It also organises consultation procedures to achieve coordinated implementation of international decisions and recommendations by Belgium,

sends representatives to these forums and provides advice on EU and OECD documents. The steering committees working under the CCIEP's remit and directly relevant to biodiversity are the following: 'Biodiversity Convention', 'Nature', 'Forests' and 'North Sea and Oceans'. Other steering groups such as those on climate change, 'Climate Change' and on sustainable consumption and production patterns are also relevant.

The **Multilateral and Strategic Affairs Department** is involved in the follow-up and implementation (at the federal level) of the CBD and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, as well as CITES. This administration is also the National Focal Point for ABS and biosafety.

The **Marine Environment Committee** implements (e.g. implementation of international and European legislation, awareness-raising actions, etc.), coordinates and defends the Belgian position at international and European meetings on the North Sea.

The Animal, Plant and Food Directorate-General of the Federal Public Service of Public Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment deals with trade in animals and plants through CITES, protection against plant diseases, pesticides and authorisations for GMO testing, for the marketing of GMOs and for their use in food and animal feed.

Besides the above-mentioned departments, several other ministries also play a role in biodiversity conservation in Belgium. For example, the Federal Public Service Economy, SMEs, Self-employed and Energy monitors the commercial aspects of biodiversity. The Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation monitors diplomatic and international aspects of the CBD. The Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGD) implements biodiversity cooperation programmes. It provides financial support to the GEF Trust Fund. The Federal Department of Mobility and Transport plays a role in preventing the import of invasive alien species by air, sea or land. The Ministry of Defence also plays an important role as a landowner (of military domains).

Moreover, the federal government oversees Belgian railways.

The Customs and Excise Administration (FPS Finance) may exercise its control and determination powers regarding infringements against the CITES convention, hunting, FLEGT (Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade) and alien species (birds, etc.). It also plays an important role in marine fisheries.

Two other key federal services are:

- The Federal Planning Bureau's Sustainable Development Task Force is responsible for developing and coordinating the implementation of sustainable development policies. Among other things, the department organises the activities of the Interdepartmental Commission on Sustainable Development (ICSDO). This forum brings together representatives of all government members as well as experts from all federal administrations. The ICDO is responsible for drawing up the Federal Plan for Sustainable Development and for holding a public consultation on it. The first two plans, already partially implemented after the government's approval in 2000 and 2004, describe various actions on interdepartmental coordination on biodiversity.
- The Federal Science Policy Administration is responsible for scientific support of federal policy on sustainable development. This administration is responsible for funding research activities and making funds available for the implementation of the CBD, including through its Global Change, North Sea, Telsat and Antarctic programmes. It funds 10 federal scientific institutions, two of which are directly involved in biodiversity-related matters: the Royal Museum for Central Africa and the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences. The secretariat of the National Focal Point of the CBD (based at the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences) receives financial support from the Federal Science Policy Office. The Belgian Platform for Biodiversity is the advisory body of this Federal Science Policy Office for everything related to biodiversity research. It aims to promote dialogue, cooperation and interdisciplinary research between people and institutions in Belgium and abroad active in the field of biological diversity. In addition, the Federal Science Policy Office also coordinates important *ex situ* collections of micro-organisms.

Community level:

- The French, Flemish and German-speaking Communities are responsible for cultural matters such as culture and media, education, language use and person-related matters, such as some aspects of health policy, youth protection and sport.
- The Communities have their own parliament and government, but the Flemish Community and the Flemish Region have merged.

Communities also play a role in the implementation of the CBD through education and public awareness. Communities can also promote scientific research on biodiversity within their competences. The cultural dimension is recognised today as an essential component of biodiversity.

1.2. ADVISORY AND CONSULTATIVE BODIES

Advisory bodies are used at both federal and regional levels.

The main advisory and consultation bodies at the federal level are the Belgian Federal Council for Sustainable Development and the Belgian Biosafety Advisory Council. Both bodies advise on special issues.

In the Walloon Region, the Walloon High Council for Nature Conservation (Conseil supérieur wallon de la Conservation de la nature - CSWCN) heads the Advisory Committees for the Management of Natural Areas (Commissions consultatives de gestion des réserves naturelles domaniales - CCGRND). In addition, there are several other councils such as:

- the Walloon High Hunting Council
- the Walloon High Council for Fisheries
- the Walloon High Council of Forestry and Wood Industry
- the Walloon Environmental Council for Sustainable Development (CWEDD)
- the Economic and Social Council of the Walloon Region (CESW)

In the Flemish Region, there are two main advisory bodies, namely the Environment and Nature Council of Flanders (Minaraad) and the Social and Economic Council of Flanders (SERV), and four sectoral advisory bodies: the Flemish High Council for River Fisheries (VHR), the Flemish High Hunting Council (VHJR), the Flemish High Council for Nature Conservation (VHRN), the Flemish High Forest Council (VHBR).³⁶

In the Brussels Capital Region, an important role is played by the Council for the Environment. For dossiers relating to nature conservation, this Council consults the Brussels High Council for Nature Conservation. Its mission is to provide advice on nature conservation.

Besides these official consultative bodies, the Brussels Capital Region also has a number of associations for the environment in general, which are part of the federative associations Inter-Environnement Bruxelles (IEB) and the Brussels Council for the Environment (BRAL). BRAL is seen by the regional and federal governments as the official advocate of active residents and residents' groups, and therefore BRAL is part of several official consultative bodies such as the Council for the Environment and the Regional Development Commission.

1.3. RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

There are several research institutions that play an important role in collecting information on biodiversity, as well as in protecting biodiversity and educating the population.

At the federal level, the following institutions can be mentioned:

- Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (RBINS),
- Management unit of the Mathematical Model of the North Sea and Scheldt estuary (MUMM)
- Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA)
- Sciensano

³⁶ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/uw-overheid/werking-en-structuur/adviesraden-in-vlaanderen>

At regional level, we can mention the following institutions:

- The Institute for Nature and Forest Research (INBO)
- Walloon Centre for Agricultural Research (CRAW in Gembloux)
- the 'Département de l'Etude du milieu naturel et agricole' (Department for Research on the Natural and Agricultural Environment) (DEMNA, Wallonia)
- 'Brussels Research Unit for Environmental, Geochemical and Life Sciences Studies' (BRUEGEL)
- Centre for Agricultural Research - Ghent (CLO Ghent)

- Meise botanical garden
- Flemish Institute for Technological Research (VITO)
- Flemish Institute for the Sea (VLIZ)

Universities and colleges play a key role in biodiversity research and education.

1.4. OTHER ACTORS

Other relevant actors include NGOs, local governments, districts, the private sector, etc.



Annex 2: Main international agreements and instruments of direct relevance to biodiversity

Key international agreements related to biodiversity signed by Belgium:

Treaties	Ratified on
<i>International treaties</i>	
Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Seals (1972)	9/02/1978
Washington Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (Washington, 1973)	3/10/1983
Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) (1980)	22/02/1984
Agreement on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS or Bonn Convention) (Bonn, 1979)	27/04/1990
Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR) (1992)	11/05/1995
United Nations Convention on Climate Change (UNCCC) (Rio, 1992)	16/01/1996
Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (under FAO) (Leipzig, 1996)	23/06/1996
Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage / World Heritage Convention (WHC) (1972)	24/07/1996
United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD or CBD) (Rio, 1992)	22/11/1996
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) (Rio, 1992)	30/06/1997
Convention on the Protection of Wetlands (Ramsar, 1971)	-
United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (1984)	13/11/1998
Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo, 1991)	9/06/1999
Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus, 1998)	21/01/2003
International Whaling Commission (IWC) (1946)	9/07/2004
Protocol on Biosafety (Cartagena, 2000)	15/04/2004
Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equal Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilisation	09/08/2016
<i>Statement</i>	
The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Farmers and Other Rural Workers (UNDROP)	
<i>Pan-European treaties and conventions of the Council of Europe</i>	
Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Plants and their Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) (Bern, 1979)	20/04/1990
European Landscape Convention - Council of Europe (Florence, 2000)	28/10/2004
Pan-European Strategy for Biological and Landscape Diversity (PEBLDS)	-

Forest Europe (Strasbourg 1990, Helsinki 1993, Lisbon 1998, Vienna 2003, Warsaw 2007, Oslo 2011, Madrid 2015, Bratislava 2021)	-
Kiev resolution on Biodiversity (2003)	-
Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas (ASCOBANS) (1992)	14/05/1993
Convention for the Protection of Bats in Europe (EUROBATS) (1994)	14/05/2003
Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) (under CMS)	13/04/2006
Council Regulation on the protection of species of wild fauna and flora by regulating trade therein (338/97) (1996)	-
The Birds Directive (79/409/EEC)	-
The Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)	-
The Water Directive (2000/60/EC)	-
The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC)	-
Environmental Liability Directive (2004/35/EC)	-
Benelux Convention on hunting and bird protection (1970)	-
Benelux Convention on Nature Conservation and Landscape Protection (1982)	-

HERE ARE SOME OF THE KEY AGREEMENTS RELATED TO BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION

CBD

The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD or CBD) is the first binding treaty in international law that focuses on biodiversity in a global and general context.

The CBD came into force on 29 December 1993. Belgium signed the Convention on 5 June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro and ratified it on 22 November 1996. The three objectives of the CBD are: the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources, including appropriate access to genetic resources and appropriate transfer of the relevant technologies, taking into account all rights related to those resources and technologies, and through appropriate funding (art. 1 of the CBD).

Cartagena protocol on biosafety

Within the framework of the CBD, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (2000), ratified by Belgium in 2004, is the only international instrument that deals exclusively with GMOs and especially their impact on biodiversity. To reduce potential adverse effects on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity arising from living modified organisms (LMOs), this protocol (in accordance with Article 8g of the CBD) establishes procedures for the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms, especially during their transboundary movements. The Protocol defines a global mechanism of procedures for the import and export of LMOs. In particular, the Protocol provides a procedure for prior informed consent, based on a scientific risk assessment for biodiversity and human health and constitutes a multilateral framework to help importing countries make decisions that are legally defensible and evidence-based. Moreover, the Protocol invites Parties to take into account the socio-economic aspects of the impact of LMOs on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, especially with regard to the value of biodiversity to indigenous and local communities, when making decisions on the importation of LMOs.



At the European level, in February 2001, the EU adopted new legislation (Directive 2001/18/EC) on the deliberate release of LMOs into the environment. According to this directive, and in line with the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, authorisations for field trials or for the commercialisation of LMOs are subject to environmental and human health risk assessment procedures. On the other hand, Directive 1946/2003/EC sets out the EU's obligations as an exporter of LMOs in line with the Cartagena Protocol.

Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilisation

Like the Cartagena Protocol, the Nagoya Protocol is a complementary international instrument to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). It provides a transparent legal framework for the effective implementation of one of the three objectives of the CBD: the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.

The Nagoya Protocol on ABS was adopted on 29 October 2010 in Nagoya, Japan and entered into force on 12 October 2014.

The Nagoya Protocol creates greater legal certainty and transparency for both suppliers and users of genetic resources by:

- Establish more predictable conditions for access to genetic resources
- Help ensure benefit sharing when genetic resources leave the country providing the genetic resources

By contributing to a better distribution of benefits, the Nagoya Protocol creates incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources and consequently enhances the contribution of biodiversity to human development and well-being.

European Regulation (EU) 511/2014 implements the compliance measures of the Nagoya Protocol at EU level and entered into force on 9 June 2014. It has applied since the Nagoya Protocol itself entered into force for the EU on 12 October 2014. Implementing regulation (EU) 2015/1866 contains measures on

specific aspects provided for in the ABS regulation, notably registered collections, best practices and user compliance monitoring. This regulation was adopted by the European Commission on 13 October 2015 and entered into force on 9 November 2015.

The following laws and decrees are in force in Belgium:

- Federal Law on Access to Federal Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Distribution of Benefits Arising from their Use, 13 October 2023
- Flemish Government decision amending various provisions on environmental policy, 7 September 2018
- Decree of the Walloon Region on access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their use - 20 May 2020

Birds Directive, Habitats Directive and NATURA 2000

At the European level, the implementation of the 1979 'Birds Directive' (Council Directive 79/409/EEC) and the 1992 'Habitats Directive' (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) and the establishment of the Natura 2000 network is a fundamental tool to achieve the objectives of the CBD.

The Birds Directive is concerned with the conservation of all bird species occurring in the wild within the territories of the member states and requires the establishment of Special Areas of Conservation areas or Birds Directive zones (SAC-B) to ensure the survival and reproduction of sensitive species.

The Habitats Directive complements the Birds Directive and covers the conservation of natural habitats and wild fauna and flora, excluding birds and their habitats. The Habitats Directive outlines a general framework for the conservation of wild animal and plant species and natural habitats of Community importance. It covers terrestrial and marine habitats and takes into account economic, cultural, social and recreational needs of local communities. Special Areas of Conservation or Habitats Directive sites (SAC-H) must be designated for the conservation of habitats and species of Community interest.

Together, SAC-Hs and SAC-Vs form the Natura 2000 network.

CITES

CITES is a multilateral environmental agreement designed to make international trade in wildlife sustainable and ensure that it does not threaten the survival of these species. Every species that is now endangered or may become endangered in the future is listed in one of the three CITES appendices. Depending on its place on these lists, trade in these species is subject to strict regulations. Continuous monitoring of the status of populations can prohibit trade in specific species and country combinations. The principle of sustainable use plays an important role in these decisions. CITES only allows trade in species whose population status has withstood the loss of individuals captured for trade.

In 1984, Belgium signed the 1973 Washington Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Ramsar

The 1971 Convention on the Conservation of Wetlands, also known as the Ramsar Convention, is an international agreement that provides the framework for local, regional and national actions and international cooperation for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. This includes halting the progressive degradation and deterioration of wetlands now and in the future and recognising the fundamental ecological functions of wetlands, as well as their economic, cultural, scientific and recreational value. Belgium ratified the Ramsar Convention in 1986.

CMS

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (also known as CMS or the Bonn Convention) aims to protect migratory species of land, sea and air animals throughout their migration. It is an intergovernmental treaty on the conservation of wildlife and habitats on a global scale. The Parties who signed CMS seek to protect migratory species threatened with extinction and migratory species that would greatly benefit from international cooperation, preserve or restore the

places where they live, reduce obstacles to migration and control other factors that may threaten them.

Within the framework of CMS, regional agreements can be concluded for Appendix II species. For Belgium, the following agreements are relevant:

- [The Convention on the Protection of Bats in Europe \(EUROBATS\)](#)

It aims to protect all 45 species of bats identified in Belgium through legislation, training, conservation measures and international cooperation with the member states of the Convention and countries that have not yet joined.

- [The Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the North and Baltic Seas and the North-East Atlantic and the Irish Sea \(ASCOBANS\)](#)

The purpose of this agreement is to promote close cooperation between the Parties to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for small cetaceans. A conservation and management plan forming part of the agreement commits the Parties to engage in habitat management and conservation, inspections and research, pollution mitigation and public information. To achieve this goal, ASCOBANS cooperates with Range States that have not (yet) signed the agreement, relevant intergovernmental organisations and non-governmental organisations.

- [The Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds \(AEWA\)](#)

AEWA covers 255 bird species that are ecologically dependent on wetlands at least during part of their annual cycle. The geographical area covered by AEWA extends from the northern borders of Canada and the Russian Federation to the southernmost tip of Africa. It provides for coordinated and concerted actions to be taken by range States throughout the waterbird migration system to which it applies.



WHC

The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention, WHC) was adopted by UNESCO's General Assembly in 1972 and is an important instrument of international cooperation to protect the world's remarkable natural and/or cultural heritage and pass it on to future generations.

The Convention seeks to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of the world's cultural and natural heritage. Cultural heritage refers to monuments, groups of buildings and sites of historical, aesthetic, archaeological, scientific, ethnological or anthropological value. Natural heritage refers to remarkable physical, biological and geological formations, habitats of endangered species and areas of scientific or aesthetic value or conservation value. The level of biodiversity within a given site is an important indicator of its importance as a natural heritage site.

The Convention recognises that countries have a duty to identify, protect, preserve and pass on their cultural and natural heritage to future generations. By signing the Convention, countries commit not only to preserve World Heritage Sites on their own territory, but also to enhance the protection of their national heritage.

Bern Convention

The Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, also known as the Bern Convention, is a binding international legal instrument on nature conservation that covers the entire natural heritage on the European continent and extends to a number of African countries. The Convention seeks to conserve wild fauna and flora and their natural habitats and to promote European cooperation in this field. The Convention was adopted and signed in Bern in September 1979 and came into force on 1 June 1982. The protection of migratory species gives the Convention a special dimension of interdependence and cooperation between the North and the South.

UNCLOS

All marine legislation is governed by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS),

which was drawn up in Montego Bay on 10 December 1982 and ratified by Belgium on 18 June 1998³⁷. This Convention can rightly be considered the (written) constitution that establishes the system to which the use of seas and oceans worldwide is subject.

OSPAR

Belgium signed the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR, 1992)³⁸. Annex V of this Convention deals with the protection and conservation of the marine ecosystem and its biological diversity. Tools to achieve this include the protection of certain species and habitats and the establishment of marine protected areas.

CCAMLR

Belgium is a member of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Fauna and Flora. It applies the precautionary principle and the ecosystem approach. As the area covers 12% of the oceans, the measures adopted could have a significant impact. Its close institutional links with the Committee for Environmental Protection organised by the Madrid Protocol of the Antarctic Treaty and its leading role in preserving the Antarctic environment make it an important stakeholder for the Antarctic region.

IWC

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) is a body established by the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (1946). It currently has 88 members. Since the 1982 moratorium on commercial whaling, its annual meetings have drawn up a management plan for the stock of small cetaceans taking into account surveillance and animal welfare. Population assessments are carried out by the Scientific Committee. While the possible resumption of commercial whaling depends on the adoption of such plan, a conservation agenda is also being developed to address problems other than commercial and scientific whaling: collisions, pollution, underwater noise,...

³⁷ <http://www.un.org/Depts/los/index.htm>

³⁸ <http://www.ospar.org/>

FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations)

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation leads international efforts to raise nutritional levels and living standards. FAO helps developing countries and countries with economies in transition modernise and improve their agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices and ensure good nutrition for all.

Of particular relevance to the Treaty are the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA) and the 'International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA)'.

CGRFA aims to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources for food and agriculture, as well as the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits derived from their use, for present and future generations. Among other things, PGRFA addresses access to *ex situ collections* not regulated by the Convention. It was adopted by the FAO Conference in November 2001 and came into force on 29 June 2004. It is a legally binding instrument with the following objectives: (1) the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture; (2) the fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from their use for sustainable agriculture and food security, in harmony with the Convention on Biological Diversity. It covers all plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, but the original multilateral system covers only the plant genetic resources listed in Annex 1 of the Treaty. Since June 2006, a standard contract for plant material exchange has been agreed to facilitate access to plant genetic resources and the sharing of benefits derived from their use.

Another important instrument of particular relevance to the implementation of the CBD is the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (1996) (previously adopted at the FAO's Fourth International Technical Conference on Plant Genetic Resources). It was endorsed by the Conference of the Parties of the CBD and the World Food Summit and has been recognised as an important contribution to the implementation of the CBD on agrobiodiversity. It consists of 20 activities related to *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation and sustainable use of plant

genetic resources, and provides a broad framework for action at community, national, regional and international levels. It places priority emphasis on developing national programmes for the safe conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources. The Second Global Plan of Action on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (Second GPA) was prepared under the high patronage of the CGRFA and adopted by the FAO Council at its 143rd Session in November 2011. It reaffirms governments' commitment to promote plant genetic resources as an essential component for food security through sustainable agriculture in the face of climate change.

Another important action plan related to biodiversity is the Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources, adopted at the International Technical Conference on Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture organised in Switzerland, in September 2007, and subsequently endorsed by all FAO Member States at the Thirty-fourth FAO Conference in November 2007. This is the first internationally agreed framework for biodiversity management in the livestock sector. It calls for the development of technical guidelines to support countries in their implementation efforts. Guidelines on the preparation of national strategies and action plans for animal genetic resources were published in 2009 and were complemented by a series of guideline publications addressing specific technical topics.

Conservation of animal genetic resources - ensuring that these valuable resources remain available for future use by livestock breeders - is one of the four strategic priority areas of the Global Plan of Action. Those guidelines focus on *in vivo* conservation, i.e. keeping populations alive rather than keeping genetic material frozen. They complement the separate guidelines on Cryo-conservation of animal genetic resources that appeared within the same series. They were endorsed by the CGRFA.

UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) was founded on 16 November 1945. The main objective of this specialised agency of the United Nations is to contribute to world peace and security by promoting cooperation among nations through education, science, culture and communication to foster universal respect for



justice, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Programme (MAB) lays the foundations within the natural and social sciences for the sustainable use and conservation of biological diversity, and for improving the relationship between humans and their environment on a global scale.

OTHER IMPORTANT AGREEMENTS

The Pan-European Strategy for Biological and Landscape Diversity (adopted at the third Ministerial Conference 'Environment for Europe' in 1995) aims to halt and reverse the decline of biological and landscape diversity in Europe. The Strategy encourages the implementation of existing measures to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biological and landscape diversity and identifies additional actions to be taken during the next two decades. The Strategy also provides a 20-year vision (1996-2016) for Europe, divided into four five-year action plans. The first five-year action plan (1996-2000) was specifically aimed at remedying the deterioration in the state of key biological and landscape systems and strengthening the coherence between them. For this period, the main focus was on integrating pan-European priorities into national policies and

initiatives based on the national biodiversity strategies, programmes and plans that each government had to prepare to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Action Plan promoted the development of national ecological networks and the realisation of a pan-European Ecological Network at 10 years.

The Benelux Convention on hunting and bird protection (1970) contains regulations with a view to consultation on the dates for the start and end of the hunting season, the minimum dimensions of the territory used for hunting, the use of weapons and methods permitted for hunting, transport and marketing of game, ...

The Benelux Convention on Nature Conservation and Landscape Protection (1982) aims to regulate joint actions and cooperation between the three governments on the conservation, management and restoration of the natural environment and landscapes. In practice, this amounts to the harmonisation and coordination of relevant policy principles and instruments of each of the three countries regarding transboundary natural areas and valuable landscapes. This is done through the development of protection and management concepts, the compilation of an inventory, the delineation and attribution of protected status to these areas, and consultation on development projects that may adversely affect them.

Annex 3:

Main international organisations impacting biodiversity

A lot of organisations operating in diverse fields are undertaking initiatives relevant to biodiversity.

UNDP (United Nations Development Programme)

UNDP is the United Nations' global development network, an organisation that advocates for change and gives (poor) countries access to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build better lives. A key domain for UNDP is energy and development policy. Through knowledge building, knowledge management, policy advice and advocacy, UNDP helps countries conserve and sustainably use biodiversity.

UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme)

UNEP's mission is to lead and encourage partnerships to conserve the environment by inspiring, informing and empowering countries and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. Biodiversity is one of the topics covered by UNEP, for which the organisation funds studies.

CSD (Commission for Sustainable Development)

The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was established in December 1992 to ensure effective monitoring of UNCED (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development) and to monitor and report on the implementation of the World Summit agreements at local, national, regional and international levels.

UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development)

UNCTAD is the main trade and development body of the United Nations General Assembly. UNCTAD's main

objectives are to optimise trade, investment and development opportunities for developing countries, help them address the challenges associated with globalisation and integrate of equity in the global economy. UNCTAD launched the BIOTRADE Initiative (1996 during COP3 of the CBD) with the aim of stimulating trade and investment in biological resources to promote sustainable development in line with the three objectives of the CBD.

UPOV (International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants)

The aim of the UPOV Convention is to promote innovation in plant improvement by granting exclusive rights to breeders in the plant species they have developed.

WHO (World Health Organisation)

The World Health Organisation draws international attention to potentially serious threats to human health and takes action to reduce their impact. While most environmental factors affecting health are closely linked to underlying environmental pressures, WHO has been particularly active in encouraging measures to integrate health and environmental initiatives into national programmes.

WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organisation)

WIPO (world intellectual property organisation) is an international organisation that promotes the use and protection of intellectual property. Due to the strong links recognised by the CBD between the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and traditional knowledge, the need arose to create new ways to protect traditional knowledge and elaborate mechanisms for access and benefit-sharing. To this end, the Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Traditional and Lore Knowledge was established in October 2000.

WTO (World Trade Organisation)

The WTO (world trade organisation) is the international body that sets trade rules between countries.



For the implementation of the CBD, the following agreements are particularly important:

the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)

- the Agreement on Agriculture (Agriculture Agreement)
- the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement)
- the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement)
- the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement).

Annex 4: Alignment with other international and European biodiversity strategies

Kunming-Montreal global framework for biodiversity • 4 strategic objectives • 23 targets	EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 • 1 objective • 4 columns • objectives • Actions and commitments	Updated national statistics for Belgium • 16 strategic objectives • 82 operational objectives
Vision 2050 By 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and used wisely, preserving ecosystem services, planetary health and essential benefits for all people.	Vision By 2050, all the planet's ecosystems are restored, resilient and adequately protected.	Vision 2050 By 2050, our biodiversity and the ecosystem services it provides - our natural capital - are valued, conserved, appropriately restored and used wisely because of their intrinsic value and because of their essential contribution to human well-being and economic prosperity.
Mission 2030 Take urgent action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, to promote the restoration of nature for the benefit of people and the planet, through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources, while ensuring the necessary resources for implementation.	Objective Restoring biodiversity in Europe by 2030, for the sake of people, the planet, the climate and our economy.	Overall objective of the strategy to 2030 The overall objective is to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity to promote the restoration of nature, for the benefit of people and the planet, through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources, ensuring the necessary resources for implementation.

Kunming-Montreal global framework for biodiversity • 4 strategic objectives • 23 targets	EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 • 1 objective • 4 columns • objectives • Actions and commitments	Updated national statistics for Belgium • 16 strategic objectives • 82 operational objectives
Goals Goal A: Maintain, enhance or restore the integrity, connectivity and resilience of all ecosystems, with the aim of significantly increasing the area of natural ecosystems by 2050; Halt the anthropogenic extinction of known threatened species and reduce the extinction rate and risk of all species by a factor of 10 by 2050 and increase the abundance of native wild species to healthy and resilient levels; Maintain genetic diversity within populations of wild and domesticated species to secure their adaptive capacity. Goal B: Use and manage biodiversity sustainably and value, conserve and enhance nature's contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services, and restore those currently in decline, to support sustainable development by 2050 for the benefit of current and future generations. Goal C: To share in a fair and equitable way the monetary and non-monetary benefits arising from the use of genetic resources and digital sequencing information on genetic resources, as well as traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources, where appropriate, including indigenous peoples and local communities, and to increase them significantly by 2050, while ensuring that traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources is appropriately protected, thereby contributing to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, in line with internationally agreed access and benefit-sharing instruments.	Pillars • Protect nature: expand protected areas to 30% of the EU's land and sea and strictly protect a third of these areas. • Restoring nature: restoring nature and ensuring sustainable management in all sectors and ecosystems. • Enabling transformative change: strengthening the EU's governance framework, knowledge, research, funding and investment in biodiversity. • EU action for global biodiversity: deploy EU external action to raise the level of ambition for biodiversity globally, reduce the impact of trade and support biodiversity outside Europe.	(operational) objectives The NBS has 16 strategic objectives and 82 operational objectives, with no priority ranking.

Kunming-Montreal global framework for biodiversity • 4 strategic objectives • 23 targets	EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 • 1 objective • 4 columns • objectives • Actions and commitments	Updated national statistics for Belgium • 16 strategic objectives • 82 operational objectives
Goal D: Provide all Parties, in particular developing country Parties, including least developed countries and small island developing states, as well as countries with economies in transition, with adequate resources for implementation, including funding, capacity building and technical and scientific cooperation, access to and transfer of technology, to fully implement the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, to progressively close the \$700 billion per year biodiversity financing gap, and to align financial flows with the Global Framework and the 2050 Biodiversity Vision.		
Target 1 - Ensure that all zones are subjected to participatory, integrated and biodiversity-friendly land use planning and/or effectively managed through land and sea use change processes to reduce the loss of areas of high biodiversity value, including ecosystems of high ecological integrity, to near zero by 2030, while respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.	- Objective 4 : [...] Habitats and species show no decline regarding conservation status or trends [...]. - A51 & A53 : Urban greening & Technical plans and advice, fundraising assistance, capacity building. - A56 : Ensure that national maritime spatial plans are consistent with EUBDS objectives.	Objective 1. Objective 2. Op objective 2.1 Op objective 3.7 Op objective 5.1

Kunming-Montreal global framework for biodiversity • 4 strategic objectives • 23 targets	EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 • 1 objective • 4 columns • objectives • Actions and commitments	Updated national statistics for Belgium • 16 strategic objectives • 82 operational objectives
Target 2 - Ensure that by 2030, at least 30% of areas with degraded terrestrial, inland, marine and coastal ecosystems are effectively restored to improve biodiversity, ecosystem functions and services, and ecological integrity and connectivity.	- Objective 3: [...] integrate ecological corridors into a true trans-European nature network. - A8: Promote and support investment in green and blue infrastructure and cooperation between member states to create ecological corridors. - A9: Protect and restore ecosystems in the EU's outermost regions and support biodiversity actions in overseas countries and territories. - Objective 4: Legally binding European nature restoration targets will be proposed by 2021, subject to an impact assessment. By 2030, significant areas of degraded and carbon-rich ecosystems have been restored. Trends and conservation status of habitats and species do not deteriorate and at least 30% [of habitats and species not currently in an FCS] achieve a favourable conservation status or show at least one positive trend by 2030. - A10: Commission proposal for a European law on nature restoration. - A11: Commission guidelines for the selection of species and habitats for priority action. - A12: Restore 30% of habitats and species not currently included in the SFCs. - A13: Commission guidelines for an EU methodology for mapping, assessing and achieving good status of ecosystems so that they can deliver benefits. - Objective 10: Substantial progress in cleaning up contaminated sites. - A32: Mapping contaminated sites, establishing conditions for good ecological status and improving soil quality monitoring.	Objective 3. Op objective 3.3. Op objective 3.4

Kunming-Montreal global framework for biodiversity • 4 strategic objectives • 23 targets	EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 • 1 objective • 4 columns • objectives • Actions and commitments	Updated national statistics for Belgium • 16 strategic objectives • 82 operational objectives
	- A34: Support the development of solutions to restore soil health and functions as part of the Horizon Europe mission "Soil Deal for Europe". - Objective 11: At least 25,000 km of free-flowing rivers are restored. - A42 and A43: Removal of barriers and restoration of floodplains....	
Target 3 - ensure that by 2030 at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, marine and coastal areas, in particular areas of high importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are adequately protected and managed through the establishment of ecologically representative, well-connected and well-balanced protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and provide the necessary resources to achieve this goal recognising indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrating relevant areas into wider landscapes, seascapes and oceans, and further ensuring that sustainable use, where applicable in these areas, is fully compatible with conservation objectives and respects the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including in relation to their traditional territories.	- Objective 1: legally protect at least 30% of the EU's land area and at least 30% of its marine area and integrate ecological corridors as part of a genuine trans-European nature network. - Objective 2: Strictly protect at least one-third of protected areas in the EU, including all remaining old-growth and primary forests in the EU. - Objective 3: Effectively manage all protected areas by defining clear conservation objectives and measures and monitoring them appropriately. - A1 - A7 : Designation and management of protected areas (Commission facilitation and review of progress, implementation by member states). - A8: Green and blue infrastructure and ecological corridors. - A9: Protection and restoration of ecosystems in EU ORs and OCTs.	Objective 3. Op objective 3.1 Op objective 3.2

Kunming-Montreal global framework for biodiversity • 4 strategic objectives • 23 targets	EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 • 1 objective • 4 columns • objectives • Actions and commitments	Updated national statistics for Belgium • 16 strategic objectives • 82 operational objectives
Target 4 - To adopt urgent management measures to halt the human-induced extinction of known threatened species and ensure their recovery and conservation, in particular endangered species, in order to significantly reduce their risk of extinction and to protect and restore genetic diversity within populations of native wild and domesticated species and between them, with a view to maintaining their adaptability, in particular through in situ and ex situ conservation measures and sustainable management methods, and to effectively manage interactions between humans and wildlife in order to reduce conflicts associated with their coexistence.	- Target 4: [...] trends and conservation status of habitats and species are not declining; and at least 30% [of species not currently in an FCS] reach a favourable conservation status or show at least one positive trend by 2030. - A11: Commission guidelines for the selection of species and habitats that do not currently have a favourable conservation status and require priority action. - A12: Restore 30% of habitats and species whose conservation status is not favourable. - Objective 5: Reverse the decline of pollinators. - A14 - A1: Implement and review the EU initiative on pollinators. - A23: Revise marketing rules for traditional agricultural crops to contribute to their conservation and sustainable use.	Objective 2. Op objective 2.2 Op objective 3.8 Op objective 3.9 Op objective 3.9.1 Op objective 3.9.2 Op objective 4.f2
Target 5 - Ensure the sustainable, safe and legal use, harvesting and trade of wild species, avoiding overexploitation, minimising impacts on non-target species and ecosystems and reducing the risk of pathogen spread, in line with the ecosystem approach, while respecting and protecting the traditional sustainable use practices of indigenous peoples and local communities.	- Objective 15: Negative impacts of fishing and extractive activities on sensitive species and habitats, including the seabed, are significantly reduced to achieve good environmental status. - A54: Reduce and maintain fishing mortality at or below MSY. - A55: Action plan for conservation of fish stocks and protection of marine ecosystems. - A57: Fishery management measures in MPAs. - Objective 16: Bycatch of species is eliminated or reduced to a level that allows species recovery and conservation. - A59: Ensure that Member States monitor bycatch, intensify data collection and take measures to eliminate or, where this is not possible, minimise bycatch.	Objective 2. Op objective 2.2 Op objective 3.10 Objective 4 Op objective 4a.1 Op objective 4e Op objective 4e.1 Op objective 4e.2

Kunming-Montreal global framework for biodiversity • 4 strategic objectives • 23 targets	EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 • 1 objective • 4 columns • objectives • Actions and commitments	Updated national statistics for Belgium • 16 strategic objectives • 82 operational objectives
	- A62 - Implementation and enforcement of environmental legislation. - A63 - Better ensuring compliance with environmental legislation. - A65 - Environmental crime directive. - A91: EU regulation on deforestation. - A92: Revised action plan against wildlife trade. - A93: Tightening rules on ivory trade in the EU. - A94: Consider strengthening the biodiversity coordination and investigation capacity of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF). - A95: Mobilise aid for trade to ensure partner countries reap benefits of biodiversity-friendly trade.	
Target 6 - Avoid, mitigate, reduce or mitigate the impacts of invasive alien species on biodiversity and ecosystem services by identifying and controlling their introduction pathways, preventing the introduction and spread of key invasive alien species, at least halving the introduction and spread rates of other known or potential invasive alien species by 2030, and eradicating or controlling invasive alien species, particularly in priority areas, including islands.	- Target 12: Reduce the number of Red List species threatened by invasive alien species by 50%. - A46: Accelerating the implementation of the EU IAS Regulation	Objective 2. Op objective 2.5

Kunming-Montreal global framework for biodiversity • 4 strategic objectives • 23 targets	EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 • 1 objective • 4 columns • objectives • Actions and commitments	Updated national statistics for Belgium • 16 strategic objectives • 82 operational objectives
Target 7 - Reduce pollution risks and negative impacts of pollution from all sources to levels safe for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services by 2030, taking into account cumulative effects, including by (a) reducing by at least half the excess nutrients lost to the environment, including through more efficient nutrient cycling and use (b) reducing by at least half the overuse of all risks from pesticides and particularly hazardous chemicals, including through science-based integrated pest management measures, taking into account food security and livelihoods; (c) preventing, reducing and working towards the elimination of plastic pollution.	- Target 6: By 2030, the risks and use of chemical pesticides are reduced by 50% and the use of more dangerous pesticides is reduced by 50%. - A15: Implement measures to reduce pesticide use and risks. - A16: Commission proposal on sustainable use of plant protection products. - Objective 13: Nutrient losses from fertilisers are reduced by 50%, leading to at least 20% reduction in fertiliser use. - A47: Reducing nutrient run-off and nitrogen and phosphorus pollution. - A48: The Integrated Nutrient Management Action Plan will identify the measures to be taken to achieve the EU and Global Environment Facility targets. - A49: Action plan for zero pollution of air, water and soil. - A50: EU chemicals strategy for sustainable development.	Objective 2. Op objective 2.4 Op objective 2.4.1 Op objective 2.4.2 Op objective 2.4.3
Target 8 - Mitigate the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification on biodiversity and enhance biodiversity resilience through mitigation, adaptation and risk reduction measures for natural disasters, including through nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem approaches, minimising negative impacts and promoting the positive impacts of climate action on biodiversity.	- A27: Work with member states to ensure the EU can prevent and fight major fires. - A35: Minimise use of whole trees and food and fodder crops for energy production. - A36: Prioritise biodiversity-friendly renewable energy solutions. - A37: Regularly assess biomass supply, demand and sustainability in the EU and globally. - A38: Assess and review the level of ambition of the Renewable Energy Directive, the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) and the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) sector. - A39: Publication of a study on the sustainability of using forest biomass for energy production.	Objective 2. Op objective 2.3 Op objective 3.4

Kunming-Montreal global framework for biodiversity • 4 strategic objectives • 23 targets	EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 • 1 objective • 4 columns • objectives • Actions and commitments	Updated national statistics for Belgium • 16 strategic objectives • 82 operational objectives
	- A40: Establish operational guidelines on the new sustainability of forest biomass for energy. - A41: Review data on biofuels with high risk of indirect land-use change and establish a pathway for their phase-out by 2030.	
Target 9 - To ensure sustainable management and use of wild species to provide social, economic and environmental benefits to people, especially vulnerable people and those most dependent on biodiversity, including through sustainable biodiversity-related activities, products and services that contribute to its enhancement, and to protect and promote the traditional sustainable use practices of indigenous peoples and local communities.	See objective 5	Objective 4. Op objective 4a.1 Objective 4.bis
Target 10 - Ensure the sustainable management of agricultural, aquaculture, fisheries and forestry areas, in particular through sustainable use of biodiversity, especially by significantly increasing the use of biodiversity-friendly practices such as sustainable intensification, agroecology and other innovative approaches, thus helping to improve the resilience, efficiency and long-term productivity of these production systems, as well as enhancing food security, conserving and restoring biodiversity and preserving nature's contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services.	- Objective 7: At least 10% of agricultural land is covered with landscape elements of high diversity. - A18: Implement measures to ensure 10% CSF. - A19: Continually evaluate progress and effects and adjust. - Target 8: At least 25% of agricultural land is managed according to organic farming principles and the adoption of agroecological practices is significantly promoted. - A20: Organic farming action plan. - A21: The PAC's strategic plans identify national values for EUBDS/F2F. - A30: Encouraging sustainable soil management practices.	Objective 4. Op objective 4b.1 Op objective 4b.2 Op objective 4b.3 Op objective 4b.3a Op objective 4b.4 Op objective 4c.1 Op objective 4c.2 Op objective 4d Op objective 4d.2 Op objective 4f.1 Op objective 4f.2 Objective 4.bis

Kunming-Montreal global framework for biodiversity • 4 strategic objectives • 23 targets	EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 • 1 objective • 4 columns • objectives • Actions and commitments	Updated national statistics for Belgium • 16 strategic objectives • 82 operational objectives
	- Objective 15: Negative impacts of fishing and extractive activities on sensitive species and habitats, including the seabed, are significantly reduced to achieve good environmental status. - A55: New action plan for conservation of fish stocks and protection of marine ecosystems. - A57: Establish fisheries management measures in marine protected areas. - A58a: Setting thresholds for seabed integrity. - A59a: Support transition to more selective and less harmful fishing techniques through EMFAF. - Target 16: Bycatch of species is eliminated or reduced to a level that allows species recovery and biodiversity development. - conservation.	
Target 11 - Restore, preserve and enhance nature's contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services such as air, water and climate regulation, soil health, pollination and disease risk reduction, as well as protection from natural hazards and disasters, through nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem approaches for the benefit of all people and nature.	- A78: Review criteria and monitoring to encourage NBS through legislation and guidelines on green public procurement. - A13: Commission guidelines for an EU methodology for mapping, assessing and achieving good status of ecosystems so that they can deliver benefits.	Objective 3. Op objective 3.4 Op objective 3.6 Op objective 4.f2 Op objective 8.4 Op objective 9.2

Kunming-Montreal global framework for biodiversity • 4 strategic objectives • 23 targets	EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 • 1 objective • 4 columns • objectives • Actions and commitments	Updated national statistics for Belgium • 16 strategic objectives • 82 operational objectives
Target 12 - To significantly increase the area, quality and connectivity of green and blue spaces in urban and densely populated areas, as well as access to and benefits from these spaces, by systematising the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, taking biodiversity into account in urban planning, enhancing biodiversity and indigenous ecological connectivity and integrity, improving the health and well-being of people and their connection with nature, promoting sustainable and inclusive urbanisation, and supporting the delivery of ecosystem functions and services.	- Target 14: Cities with at least 20,000 inhabitants have an ambitious urban greening plan. - Target 9: Three billion additional trees will be planted in the EU, in full respect of ecological principles. - A29: EU roadmap for 3 billion extra trees. - A100: Support global efforts to implement One Health approach.	Op objective 3.5
Target 13 - To take effective legal, policy, administrative and capacity-building measures at all levels, as appropriate, to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources and information on digital sequencing of genetic resources, as well as traditional knowledge related to genetic resources, and to facilitate appropriate access to genetic resources, and to promote a significant increase in shared benefits by 2030, in line with applicable international instruments on access and benefit-sharing.		Objective 6. Op objective 6.1 Op objective 6.2 Op objective 6.3

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Target 14 - Ensure that biodiversity and its many values are fully taken into account in policies, regulations, planning and development processes, poverty reduction strategies, strategic environmental assessments, environmental impact assessments and, where appropriate, in national accounting, at all levels of government and in all sectors, especially those with significant impacts on biodiversity, and gradually align all relevant public and private activities and fiscal and financial flows with the objectives and targets of this Framework.	- A76: Develop methods, criteria and standards to better integrate biodiversity considerations into public and commercial decision-making at all levels and to measure the ecological footprint of products and organisations. - A77: Promoting an international natural capital accounting initiative. - A78: Review criteria and monitoring to encourage nature-based solutions for green public procurement. - A100: Support global efforts to implement the One Health approach. - A101: Integrating biodiversity into bilateral and multi-lateral agreements. - A36: Prioritise biodiversity-friendly renewable solutions.	Objective 4. Op objective 4b.1 Op objective 4d Op objective 4d.2 Op objective 4e.1 Op objective 4f.1 Op objective 4.d1 Op objective 4.f1 Op objective 4.f2 Op objective 4.f3 Objective 5 Op objective 5.5 Op objective 5.7 Op objective 5.8 Op objective 9.3 Objective 10 Op objective 10.1 Op objective 10.2 Op objective 10.3 Objective 11 Op objective 11.1 Op objective 11.2 Objective 13 Op objective 13.1 Op objective 13.2 Op objective 13.3
Target 15 - Adopt legal, administrative or policy measures to encourage and enable businesses to act, including by ensuring that large companies and transnational corporations, as well as financial institutions:	- A66: New sustainable corporate governance initiative on human rights, environmental due diligence and value chain due diligence. - A67: Further support for the B@B movement in the EU.	Op objective 5.2 Op objective 5.4

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(a) Regularly and transparently monitor, assess and report their risks, dependencies and impacts on biodiversity, including through provisions applicable to all large companies and transnational corporations and financial institutions with respect to their operations, supply and value chains and portfolios ; (b) inform consumers with a view to promoting sustainable consumption patterns; (c) report on compliance with access and benefit-sharing provisions and measures, as applicable; report on compliance with access and benefit-sharing provisions and measures; progressively reduce negative impacts on biodiversity, increase positive impacts on biodiversity, increase positive impacts, reduce biodiversity-related risks for companies and financial institutions and promote measures to ensure sustainable production patterns.	- A67: Review of disclosure requirements for companies under the non-financial reporting directive (CSR directive, delegated act under preparation on environmental disclosure requirements and Commission guidelines on non-financial reporting). - A73: Delegated act under taxonomy regulation, including technical selection criteria for the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems. - A74: Strategy for sustainable financing. - A76: Develop methods, criteria and standards to better integrate biodiversity considerations into public and commercial decisions and measure ecological footprints. - A77: Promote international natural capital accounting initiative.	
Target 16 - encourage and empower people to make sustainable consumption choices, including through the creation of enabling policy, legislative or regulatory frameworks, improving education and access to relevant and accurate information and alternatives, and by 2030, reduce the global consumption footprint in an equitable manner, in particular by halving global food waste, significantly reducing overconsumption and significantly reducing waste generation, so that everyone can live comfortably in harmony with Mother Earth.	- A76: Develop methods, criteria and standards to better integrate biodiversity considerations into public and commercial decisions and measure ecological footprints. - A82: Council recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability and the competence framework	Op objective 4bis Op objective 5.3 Op objective 5.4

Kunming-Montreal global framework for biodiversity • 4 strategic objectives • 23 targets	EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 • 1 objective • 4 columns • objectives • Actions and commitments	Updated national statistics for Belgium • 16 strategic objectives • 82 operational objectives
Target 17 - Create and strengthen capacities for the implementation in all countries of the measures relating to the safety of biotechnologies referred to in Article 8(g) of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and of the measures relating to the management of biotechnology and the sharing of its benefits as provided for in Article 19 of that Convention.		Objective 7. Op objective 7.1 Op objective 7.2
Target 18 - By 2025, identify incentives, including subsidies, that are harmful to biodiversity and eliminate, phase out or modify them in a proportionate, fair, effective and equitable manner, and substantially and progressively reduce them by at least USD 500 billion per year by 2030, starting with the most harmful incentives, and strengthen positive incentives for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.	- A72: Strengthen EU biodiversity assessment framework to ensure EU funding supports biodiversity-friendly investments. - A75: Promote and encourage tax changes to reflect environmental costs. - A88: Global WTO agreement to ban harmful fisheries subsidies.	Op objective 5.6
Target 19 - Substantially and progressively increase financial resources from all sources, in an effective and timely manner and with easy access, including domestic, international, public and private resources, in accordance with Article 20 of the Convention, to implement national biodiversity strategies and action plans, mobilising at least USD 200 billion per year by 2030, including through efforts to:	- A69: Make at least €20 billion per year available for biodiversity (including through the CAP, ERDF/CFF, EMFAF, LIFE, Horizon Europe, InvestEU and RRF) and invest a significant part of the 25% of the EU budget earmarked for climate action in biodiversity and nature-based solutions. - A70: Develop a framework for priority action at EU level. - A71: Develop a natural capital and circular economy initiative in the order of €10 billion over the next 10 years. - A62: Prioritise political support and financial and human resources to ensure better implementation, enforcement and, where necessary, revision of environmental legislation affecting biodiversity (especially EU nature and biodiversity legislation).	Objective 15. Op objective 15.1 Op objective 15.2 Op objective 15.3 Op objective 15.4 Op objective 15.5 Op objective 15.6 Op objective 15.7

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(a) Increase the total amount of biodiversity-related international financial resources from developed countries, including official development assistance, and from countries that voluntarily meet the obligations of developed country Parties, to developing countries, in particular least developed countries and small island developing states, as well as countries with economies in transition, to at least USD 20 billion per year by 2025, and to at least USD 30 billion per year by 2030; (b) Significantly increase domestic resource mobilisation through the development and implementation of national biodiversity financing plans or similar instruments, taking into account country needs, priorities and circumstances; (c) Leverage private finance, promote blended finance, implement strategies to mobilise new and additional resources and encourage the private sector to invest in biodiversity, including through impact funds and other instruments; (d) Promote innovative schemes such as payments for ecosystem services, green bonds, biodiversity credits and offsets and benefit-sharing mechanisms, while respecting environmental and social safeguards; (e) Maximise co-benefits and synergies of funding targeting biodiversity and climate-related crises;		

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(f) Strengthening collective action, especially by indigenous peoples and local communities, actions in favour of Mother Earth³⁹ and non-commercial approaches, including community-based approaches to natural resource management, as well as cooperation and solidarity among civil society organisations, to conserve biological diversity; (g) improving effectiveness, efficiency and transparency in the provision and use of resources.		
Target 20 - enhance capacity building and development, access to and transfer of technology, and promotion of innovation and technical and scientific cooperation and access thereto, including through south-south, north-south and triangular cooperation, in order to promote effective implementation, particularly in developing countries together with encouraging cooperation in the development of technologies and scientific research programmes related to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and strengthening related scientific research and monitoring capacities, and ensuring that these actions are proportionate to the ambition of the goals and targets of the global framework	- A96: Increase support to partner countries for the protection and restoration of ecosystems and sustainable management of natural resources. - A97: Support Western Balkan countries and EU neighbours in their efforts to protect, sustainably use, restore and integrate biodiversity. - A98: Launch the “NaturAfrica” initiative and similar initiatives in other regions to halt biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation while enabling sustainable green development and providing multiple benefits to local communities (text of the annex adapted for the purpose of this table, based on DG INTPA's contribution). - A99: Systematically strengthen the links between biodiversity protection and sustainable socio-economic development in partner countries. - A101: Integrating biodiversity into bilateral and multi-lateral engagements	Objective 12. Op objective 12.1 Op objective 12.2 Op objective 12.3 Op objective 12.4

³⁹ Actions in favour of Mother Earth: An ecocentric and rights-based approach, conducive to implementing actions aimed at establishing harmonious and complementary relationships between people and nature, promoting the sustainability of all living beings and their communities, and avoiding the commodification of Mother Earth's environmental functions.

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Target 21 - Ensure that policy-makers, practitioners and the public have access to the best available data, information and knowledge to support effective and equitable governance and integrated and participatory management of biodiversity and to strengthen communication, awareness-raising, education, monitoring, research and knowledge management; in this context, traditional knowledge, innovations, practices and technologies of indigenous peoples and local communities should only be used with their free, prior and informed consent ⁴⁰ , in accordance with national legislation.	- A79: Creation of an EU knowledge centre on biodiversity. - A80: Promote research, innovation and knowledge exchange on biodiversity between science, policy and society. - A81: Creation of a biodiversity partnership under Horizon Europe. - A82: Council recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability.	Op objective 6.4 Objective 8. Op objective 8.1 Op objective 8.2 Op objective 8.3 Op objective 8.4 Op objective 8.5 Objective 9 Op objective 9.1
Target 22 - Ensure the full, equitable, inclusive, effective and gender-sensitive representation and participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in decision-making processes, as well as their access to justice and to biodiversity-related information, respecting their cultures and their rights to their lands, territories, resources and traditional knowledge, and paying attention to the participation of women and girls, children and youth, as well as persons with disabilities, and ensuring the full protection of environmental human rights defenders.	- A60: Implementation of new governance framework for biodiversity. - A63: Better ensuring compliance with environmental requirements. - A64: Review of Aarhus regulation. - A65: Review and possible revision of environmental crime directive. - A100: More mutual benefits and fewer trade-offs between biodiversity protection and human rights, gender, health, education, conflict sensitivity, rights-based approaches, land tenure and the role of indigenous peoples and local communities.	Objective 14. Op objective 6.3

⁴⁰ Free, prior and informed consent refers to the tripartite terminology "prior and informed consent" or "free, prior and informed consent" or "approval and participation".

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Target 23 - Ensure gender equality in the implementation of the framework through a gender-sensitive approach so that all women and girls have the same opportunities and capacities to contribute to the achievement of the three goals of the Convention, including through the recognition of their equal rights and access to land and natural resources, and by promoting their full, equitable, meaningful and informed participation and leadership at all levels of biodiversity action, participation, policy development and decision-making.		Objective 14. Op objective14.1 Op objective14.2

Contacts

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The **Biodiversity National Focal Point** is based at the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (RBINS). It is Belgium's link to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The National Focal Point acts as the facilitator between the CBD Secretariat and all implementing actors in Belgium. The National Focal Point also cooperates with other countries, various organizations and informs the general public. It relies on a large network of collaborators in Belgium and abroad, who are essential partners for the execution of the wide range of activities generated by the various mandates: exchange of information, support to the policy process, education and training, public awareness, international collaboration, etc.

Regionale en federale deskundigen aangesteld door de Interministeriële Conferentie Leefmilieu. om de correcte implementatie van de Nationale Biodiversiteitsstrategie, de opvolging ervan en de deelneming aan de herziening van de verschillende betrokken sectoren binnen de regionale en federale overheden te stimuleren:

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CBD milestones in Belgium

- **United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**

Endorsement of the CBD: 5 June 1992 (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development)

Ratification of the CBD: 22 November 1996

Entry into force: 20 February 1997

Establishment of the Coordination Committee for International Environment Policy (CCIEP):

5 April 1995, chaired by FPS Health, Food Chain Security and Environment - DG Environment
Set up of the Steering Committee "Biodiversity Convention" and "Nature": 1995

Designation of the CBD National Focal Point: July 1995, the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences.

Regional Focal Points: ANB (Flanders), Brussels Environment (Brussels), DGARNE (Wallonia).

Adoption of Belgium's National Biodiversity Strategy: October 2006, update in 2013

National reports on implementation of the CBD: 1998, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2014

Mid-term state of play of the NBS: 2012

Thematic reports: Indicators (2001), Forests (2002), Protected areas (2003, 2007, 2009), Global Taxonomy Initiative (2004), Marine and Coastal Biodiversity (2009)

- **The Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM)** under the CBD is an information-sharing mechanism set up to promote and facilitate scientific and technical cooperation in relation to the three objectives of the Convention. It also plays an important role in developing public awareness on these three objectives. The CHM operates mainly, but not exclusively, through the Internet and has the form of a structurally decentralised and distributed network of Parties and partners working together to facilitate the implementation of the Convention. Belgium has been an active participant since 1996. The URL of the website is www.biodiv.be

Belgian species list (all things considered): www.species.be

- **Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB)**

Endorsement: 24 May 2000

Ratification: 15 April 2004
Entry into force: 14 July 2004

Designation of the Biosafety Focal Point: September 2004,
the Federal Public Service of Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment

Endorsement of the Nagoya - Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety: 20 September 2011

The Biosafety Clearing-House under the CBD is the information sharing mechanism for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (<http://bch.cbd.int>). Belgium has been an active participant since 2004.

The URL of the website is <http://www.biosafetyprotocol.be>

- **Nagoya Protocol on ABS Endorsement of the Nagoya Protocol on ABS:** 21 September 2011

- **Ratification: ongoing**

Publications of the CBD National Focal Point: The book 'Biodiversity in Belgium, a country study' (2003) presents a panorama of the status of knowledge and trends of biodiversity in Belgium (including prokaryotic, fungal, botanical and zoological diversity). The publication 'La biodiversité en Belgique, un aperçu / Biodiversiteit in België, een overzicht' (2013) presents an updated summary of the country study for the general public and is freely available upon request so as the publication 'La biodiversité en Belgique, une question vitale / Biodiversiteit in België, van vitaal belang' (2013) and '366 gestes pour la biodiversité / 366 tips voor biodiversiteit' (2010), information folder on the NBS (2014).

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