

# CONSULTATION STRATEGY

## IMPACT ASSESSMENT ACCOMPANYING A DRAFT LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL ON EU NATURE RESTORATION TARGETS

### 1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Healthy ecosystems – from forests and grasslands to coastal wetlands and seaweed meadows, from croplands to urban green areas – support rich biodiversity and deliver essential benefits to society. For instance, they sequester and store carbon and contribute to climate change adaptation and risk disaster control by reducing flooding or acting as coastal buffers. However, recent assessments of the state of biodiversity in the EU show that biodiversity and ecosystems continue to be degraded as a result of pressures from human activities, and essential ecosystem services that people depend on are in decline.

Ecosystems can be effectively restored by reducing pressures (such as pollution, human-induced disaster risks or over-exploitation of resources), or by actively helping damaged ecosystems to recover (for example by re-introducing native species or changing landscape / seascape features). To date, efforts to restore ecosystems in the EU have been insufficient. The EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 set a [voluntary target](#) to restore at least 15% of degraded ecosystems by 2020. This target has not been met. Restoration plans were developed just by few Member States. Some progress has been reported, in particular in areas where legal obligations exist, but implementation and enforcement challenges remain.

The [EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#) is a key element of the [European Green Deal](#). It aims to put Europe's biodiversity on the path to recovery by 2030 for the benefit of people, planet, climate and the economy. It outlines an EU Nature Restoration Plan to restore damaged ecosystems and ensure their sustainable management.

A key element of this plan is a commitment for the European Commission to propose, in 2021, legally binding EU targets to restore degraded terrestrial and marine ecosystems, in particular those with the most potential to capture and store carbon (carbon-rich ecosystems), and to prevent and reduce the impact of natural disasters. The Strategy also announces that the Commission will consider the possibility of an EU-wide methodology to map, assess and achieve good condition of ecosystems, so that they can deliver benefits and services such as climate regulation, bioremediation, water regulation, soil formation, pollination and disaster prevention and protection.

The Draft Legislative Proposal on EU Nature Restoration Targets, to be presented by the Commission in 2021, will be accompanied by an Impact Assessment. This consultation strategy outlines the consultation activities envisaged as part of the Impact Assessment.

It is worth noting that previous stakeholder consultation in the context of biodiversity have received considerable public interest and response, and this experience may be enjoyed again in this new context. In particular, the fitness check of the nature Directives<sup>1</sup> received 552,472 responses. Responses were received from every EU Member State. Most responses came from individuals (547,500 or 99%). 2,371 were

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/fitness\\_check/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/fitness_check/index_en.htm)

from businesses (of which more than half came from micro-enterprises with less than ten staff), followed by NGOs (824 replies), other organisations/ associations (817 replies), governments/ public authorities (356 replies), and academic or research institutes (232 replies). The large majority of respondents replied that their main field of activity or interest was “nature” (93% or 511,353), followed by those active or interested in hunting (4% or 23,928). This information is reflected in the mapping for this stakeholder consultation.

For more information, please consult the [Inception Impact Assessment](#).

## 2. CONSULTATION SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

The **scope of the consultation** relates closely to the **policy objective to restore degraded ecosystems**. The policy approach to attain this objective should, together with existing policy instruments, lead to all ecosystems being in good condition by 2050 – the headline ambition of the strategy. Reflecting the urgency to act, the initiative also needs to lead to measurable results by 2030. The consultation covers this full scope.

The consultation activity needs to build on and complement a number of other consultation activities that take place in parallel. In particular:

- The ongoing evaluation of the Biodiversity Strategy 2020. As the evaluation and the Impact Assessment will run partly concurrently, there are synergies to be made from linking the consultation work. This relates to the content (the evaluation will largely provide the problem analysis for the Impact Assessment) and the need to avoid stakeholder fatigue (this is a regular complaint, and so asking questions together and once will be less onerous for stakeholders).
- Consultation activities on inception impact assessments or full stakeholder consultations on recent, ongoing, or planned EU initiatives in relevant areas (such as the Fitness Check of EU water legislation, the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change, the review of the Regulation on land use, land use changes- and forestry, the planned updates of the EU soil thematic strategy and of the EU forest strategy, the ongoing review of the application of the EU Regulation on invasive alien species, among others). Such consultation activities have a different focus and purpose. They nevertheless contain elements that are also informative for this specific initiative and will be taken into account.

The **objective of the stakeholder consultation** is twofold, namely to:

1. Gather information and insights (such as personal views, practical experiences, evidence and data) from a wide range of stakeholders, particularly on topics where available existing evidence is scarce, and
2. Test/validate existing analysis and preliminary findings to ensure that the Impact Assessment is informed by stakeholders and responds to their needs and interests.

The result of the stakeholder consultations will be a pillar of the data triangulation needed for an evidence-based policy, through an Impact Assessment process that is open and transparent. The information and evidence gathered from the stakeholder consultation activities will be presented in the form of a longer report in the support

study, and also summarised in a Consultation synopsis report that will form one of the Annexes to the Impact Assessment report.

This consultation strategy will be further elaborated by the contractor responsible for providing support for the impact assessment process, including in particular the mapping of the stakeholders for the targeted consultation. As the contractor is already working on the evaluation of the Biodiversity Strategy to 2020, synergies will be sought with the evaluation's stakeholder consultation activities.

### 3. MAPPING OF STAKEHOLDERS

This is a preliminary mapping of the broad stakeholder groups that need to be consulted as a minimum in the course of the impact assessment. The contractor responsible for supporting the impact assessment will further elaborate the mapping, in consultation with the Commission services.

**Member States** – this includes as a minimum the Competent Authorities at national and subnational levels in charge of the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy (Ministries of Environment or equivalent). It could also include Nature Conservation Agencies, in coordination with the contacts to the competent authorities. Other national and sub-national Competent Authorities will also be engaged, in particular authorities in charge of land, water and sea use and management, and natural and disaster risk management.

**Umbrella organisations, groups and stakeholders** in the most relevant areas and sectors at the EU, national and sub-national levels. This will include organisations in a wide range of sectors, such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture (including Advisory Councils), hunters, landowners, extractive, transport, energy, climate, financing, health, and the tourism and recreation sectors. It will also be relevant for stakeholders in areas like water and air quality. Regional Sea Conventions will also be consulted. **Non-Governmental Organisations** including in conservation, the environment, climate, social, animal welfare and other areas, **academia and research organisations** will be consulted, as will be the **wider general public**.

The online public consultation will provide an opportunity for any interested stakeholders to contribute proactively. It will also be used to complement and further elaborate the stakeholder mapping.

### 4. SELECTION OF CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES & THEIR ACCESSIBILITY

A variety of methods and tools will be used to ensure a comprehensive and well-balanced consultation process.

- The [Inception Impact Assessment](#) of the initiative, open for public feedback from 4 November to 2 December 2020, will gather reactions by stakeholders on the main elements of the initiative.
- An online public consultation will run for 12 weeks in all EU official languages, from 11 January to 5 April 2021. The consultation will collect stakeholder views especially on the approach to devising the Commission's proposal for binding restoration targets and the main elements of a possible future instrument. It will be based on a structured online questionnaire to be published on the Commission website. Stakeholders will have the possibility to provide additional

comments and position papers. To avoid stakeholder fatigue and create synergies between different parts of the policy cycle, this consultation will be carried out together with two further EU biodiversity policy initiatives, namely the evaluation of the Biodiversity Strategy to 2020, and the review of the application of the EU Regulation on Invasive Alien Species.

- **A minimum of two stakeholder workshops** will be organised in the first half of 2021 with the aim to discuss policy options and obtain views from a broad range of stakeholders on:
  - Workshop 1: the main options for restoration targets, the conditions in which these targets should be implemented, as well as potential social, economic and wider environmental impacts that need to be taken into account.
  - Workshop 2: the preliminary findings of the impact assessment support study.

The workshops will be set up in a way to ensure the participation of all stakeholder groups identified as relevant in this document. They will be open to participation by further stakeholder groups that may be identified as relevant in later stages (for example based on further stakeholder analysis, or interest expressed). The workshops will be online in view of the constraints of the Covid-19 situation and possible travel-related limitations for some stakeholder groups. An online format will also ensure broad outreach, and the use of a range of tools to enable input from a large number of participants.

The second workshop will also present preliminary findings of the evaluation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020, which would also provide lessons learnt for the EU restoration targets.

- Feedback from Member State representatives will be obtained through relevant Commission expert groups, in particular regular consultations of the Coordination Group on Biodiversity and Nature, the working groups on Green Infrastructure and Restoration, on the Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services, on Forests and Nature, the Nature Directives Expert Group (NADEG), as well as expert groups related to other environmental, climate and sector policies (for example AGRI or MARE led expert groups with Member States and stakeholders). These workshops will seek input on a range of topics concerning the setting of the targets and the conditions in which they should be implemented, including how they should be broken down into national commitments and measures to enable implementation, monitoring and reporting.
- Additional targeted stakeholder consultations will further be planned with a smaller number of key stakeholder representatives and experts, in order to allow for more in-depth discussion and follow-up in order to refine concepts.
- The impact assessment will further examine public attitudes gathered through other relevant consultations and Eurobarometer surveys.

## **5. CONSULTATION WEBPAGE & COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES**

Information about upcoming consultations on this initiative will be provided via [Europa](#), a [dedicated page](#) on the Commission's website and through social media (specifically, through [DG Environment's twitter account](#)).

The [Inception Impact Assessment](#) was published on Europa on 4 November 2020 for feedback until 2 December.

The online public consultation will be accessible from the [Have your say Portal](#) and will be open for 12 weeks from 11 January to 5 April 2021.

Consultation opportunities will be highlighted during the stakeholder workshops.

A summary of the results of the public consultation will be published on the consultation page, once all consultation activities are closed, respecting data privacy and anonymity.