



## **BUSINESS AND BIODIVERSITY - BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS**

### **THE EU BUSINESS AND BIODIVERSITY INITIATIVE BEYOND THE LISBON CONFERENCE**

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**DG ENVIRONMENT  
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#### **The EU agenda for biodiversity**

The European Union has a stated political aim dating from the 2001 European Summit in Gothenburg "to halt biodiversity decline by 2010". At a global level, in 2002 at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the EU also committed itself to "significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010".

In May 2006 the European Commission adopted a Communication entitled "Halting the loss of Biodiversity by 2010 - and beyond - sustaining ecosystem services for human well-being"<sup>1</sup>. This communication sets the EU agenda for biodiversity. While confirming the central importance of existing legislation and in particular the Natura 2000 network, the communication also sets out a more comprehensive and inclusive vision for biodiversity protection with a specific focus given to the goods and services provided by ecosystems.

This Communication identified a number of key objectives and actions that will be necessary to halt biodiversity decline. One of the key measures is the building of more effective partnerships, including partnerships with Business both at the level of the EU and in the Member States, fully in line with the global commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

In the political agendas of the German, Portuguese and Slovenian presidencies of the EU (January 2007 - June 2008), the protection of biodiversity and the integration of biodiversity criteria into business decision-making and corporate governance ("Business and Biodiversity") have been recognised as a common priority.

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<sup>1</sup> COM (2006) 216 OJ C184, 8.8.06 p. 121.

More specifically Portugal, in its capacity as current Presidency of the EU, has been working with the European Commission on the development of an initiative to strengthen the links between business and biodiversity protection. The working title for this is "Building Better Partnerships: linking Business to Biodiversity" (The EU B@B initiative)<sup>2</sup>.

The European Commission has organised a series of stakeholder consultations to obtain the views of Member States, business and non-governmental organisations about the principles, objectives and possible elements for any EU-level action on business and biodiversity.

### **Added value of EU dimension**

The European Commission is aware that there are already different national and international initiatives aimed at promoting the integration of biodiversity into business governance. However, the integration of biodiversity into major EU policy areas such as agriculture, regional development, fisheries, energy, transport, trade, development aid and research means that there is a clear added value to an EU action on Business and Biodiversity. EU leadership has also proven to be a valuable catalyst for national action, sharing of experience and good practice, and for the communication and mainstreaming of results.

Specifically for the business and biodiversity initiative:

- The EU has a clearly established biodiversity agenda, and provides an excellent forum for cooperation and common action;
- The EU has set an ambitious target and will play a leading role to help meet the global commitments under the CBD;
- There is also a very important clear link to Natura 2000, the EU's ecological network, the centre-piece of EU nature protection, the establishment of which is now moving on to management and financing of the sites. This provides a potentially very good opportunity for business, especially Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) at the local level and is appropriate for site-specific actions with multi-stakeholder approach.

### **Further development of the EU Business and Biodiversity Initiative**

The Lisbon conference will provide an opportunity for representatives of Business, Member States, NGOs and the Commission to identify areas of mutual interest for co-operation in relation to the linkages between Business and Biodiversity.

The Directorate General for the Environment of the European Commission would invite those Business sectors with an interest in building partnerships for biodiversity protection at the European level to take contact with the Commission with a view to developing joint actions.

In taking forward this initiative, DG Environment will be guided by the following principles:

- The Business and Biodiversity initiative is directed towards stopping biodiversity decline. Actions engaged under the initiative should deliver tangible and measurable results for Biodiversity protection;

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<sup>2</sup> Explanatory note: the B@B acronym is proposed because B&B is the short-hand for bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

- Engagement and actions undertaken by Business in the context of the B@B initiative are not a substitute for - or an exemption from - existing environmental regulatory commitments: they must go beyond current legal requirements;
- Any partnerships developed with Business sectors must also involve the Member States and the NGO community in the design and the implementation of the partnership;
- Additional actions taken by Business with regard to biodiversity protection under the initiative should be of a voluntary nature (B@B will not be a regulatory measure);
- The B@B initiative will pay particular attention to the role of SMEs in the delivery of biodiversity protection;
- B@B aims to provide EU added value and to build upon, and be synergetic with, on-going actions at the local, national, regional and global level;
- The initiative should not give rise to heavy bureaucracy or red-tape;
- An attempt will be made to monitor and quantify the contribution of the initiative towards halting biodiversity decline;
- The initiative will support medium/long-term partnerships;
- The initiative will give recognition to the importance of business good-practices to reduce the rate of biodiversity decline and the value of biodiversity for sustainable entrepreneurial activity.

### **Commission Follow-Up**

In 2008 DG Environment of the European Commission is planning (subject to the satisfactory completion of all the necessary financial and administrative steps) to establish a technical support facility to promote the continued development of the EU Business and Biodiversity Initiative. The role of the facility will be to:

- i) work with interested Business sectors to promote an awareness of biodiversity protection within the sector;
- ii) work with the sectors to bench-mark best practice in that sector with regard to the protection of Biodiversity. This may also include the development of best practice guidance concerning the responsibilities and opportunities already existing for companies in relation to the EU nature legislation (e.g. working with Natura 2000 network, using Natura 2000 in the context of sustainable tourism or the development of labelling and marketing associated with products originating from High Nature Value and/or Natura 2000 areas);
- iii) work with the Business sectors, their associated national federations, Member States organisations and representatives of civil society to promote the implementation of best practice adapted as required to the specific conditions of the companies concerned;
- iv) make a special effort, by working through the Business Associations, national federations and other bodies, to promote awareness of biodiversity issues among SMSs;

- v) develop mechanisms for monitoring and recording the delivery of biodiversity benefits resulting from the actions associated with the project.
- vi) develop an award/rating system to recognise Business sectors or companies that make an outstanding contribution to the protection of biodiversity.

The facility will, as a matter of principle, involve civil society as well as business in its activities.

It is intended that the facility will be in existence for a number of years but that its activities should eventually become self-financing.