

TOWARDS A CONCEPT PAPER

BUSINESS AND BIODIVERSITY-BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

Background

The European Union has a stated political aim dating from 2001 "to halt biodiversity decline by 2010". At a global level in 2002 at the WSSD, the EU 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".

The Communication of May 2006 identified a number of key objectives and actions that will be necessary to halt biodiversity decline. One of the key actions was the building of more effective partnerships, including partnerships with Business both at the level of the EU and in the Member States.

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

Portugal has announced that one of the priorities in its environmental agenda, during its Presidency in the second half of 2007, will be the development with the Commission of an initiative to strengthen the links between business and biodiversity protection and informed its intention to host a major conference on the theme of biodiversity and business. This conference will take place on 12/13 November in Lisbon. It is foreseen that the conference will have two major objectives: 1) to provide a high profile event that will generate interest in the issue of business and biodiversity and showcase best business practice in this area 2) provide a forum to discuss/launch a longer –term EU wide action to develop stronger partnerships between Business and Biodiversity protection. The outcomes of the Conference will contribute to a longer-term action which could be packaged as the EU Business and Biodiversity initiative (EU B@B initiative).

Related work has already begun under the auspices of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), leading to a decision of the Eighth Conference of the Parties (COP) (VIII/17) with which Parties committed themselves to engage more prominently with business. Thus this initiative will be a response to some of the measures contained in this decision. In 2008 there will be the COP9 meeting of CBD taking place in Bonn, Germany in the spring, when work based on this decision will be reviewed. The IUCN- World Conservation Union has for several years been working on the issues of business and biodiversity, and there will be a major IUCN meeting in Barcelona, Spain in the autumn of 2008. Therefore the results of the Portuguese conference as well as the developing EU B@B initiative would be an explicit contribution to these global events in 2008.

Some Member States have already initiated action at the national level, or have already started a dialogue with specific sectors such as tourism. The explicit purpose of this initiative is to identify the added value at the EU level, and to put in place a mechanism to bring out that added value.

Building Better Partnerships linking Business to Biodiversity (The EU B@B initiative)

Objectives

The primary objective which derives from the Commission's communication on halting biodiversity decline and its associated action plan is to contribute to reducing the rate of biodiversity decline by 2010 (and beyond).

Therefore, it is absolutely crucial that the initiative will have an added value and make a real contribution to achieving this primary objective.

First Principles

At present, we must further elaborate on the nature of the EU B@B initiative; we foresee that the initiative will largely be shaped by inputs from Member States, stakeholders, including NGOs and in particular the business world. However, there are a number of basic conditions (first principles) that we believe should be respected:

- The engagement and actions undertaken by Business in the context of the B@B initiative must go beyond current legal requirements.
- These additional actions taken by Business with regard to biodiversity protection should be of a voluntary nature (the B@B initiative should not be a regulatory measure).
- The initiative should be built upon and be synergetic with on-going actions at the local, national, regional or global level.
- The initiative should not give rise to heavy bureaucracy or red-tape.
- The initiative should contribute to on-going global actions.
- The contribution of the initiative towards halting biodiversity decline should be quantifiable.
- The initiative should look to medium/long-term partnerships.
- The initiative should recognize the importance of business good-practices to reduce the rate of biodiversity decline and the value of biodiversity for sustainable entrepreneurial activity.

The EU Initiative should be based on and promote three elements: awareness (understanding); technical support for companies to develop their biodiversity strategies and activities (knowledge, benchmarking of best practices, management tools, monitoring schemes); and action to stimulate businesses to take biodiversity on board (publicity, awards, recognition).

The Perspective from the side of Business

For many business sectors there are sound economic arguments for protecting and conserving biodiversity. Within the context of the programmes and initiatives being developed for example under CBD and the IUCN initiative on Business and Biodiversity, there is excellent documentation setting out the "Business case" for biodiversity protection. However, what we need to explore is what would attract companies to participate in an EU initiative on Business and Biodiversity. We also need to keep in mind the question of added value; preaching to the converted and associating companies or sectors that are already using best practice will not make a significant difference to biodiversity.

Essentially, only Business can tell us what design features they would like to see built into a future EU B@B initiative and we therefore need to engage with our Business partners to continue to hear their views on this issue.

Possible Model

Standard practice would be for the Commission to develop a proposal for eventual agreement with the other institutions in the form of a regulation, directive, action plan etc. However, we have very few if any precedents for the type of voluntary actions we are considering for the B@B initiative. The model set out below, is a very first outline of a possible approach for an EU initiative on Business and Biodiversity. It is intended to stimulate debate.

1) Starting Point

The first step could be the elaboration of general principles which could take the form of a charter. Adherence to these general principles or signing of the charter by stakeholders, in particular a company or business group would be regarded as an indication of intent and a prior condition for the establishment of partnerships and further participation in the EU B@B initiative. Companies and organisations could commit themselves to the principles/sign the charter as part of the Lisbon conference.

2) Development of an EU Platform

An EU B@B facility would be created with the task of engaging with Business sectors to develop sector specific packages relating to Biodiversity protection. These packages could include benchmarking best practice, the development of sector specific biodiversity audit/accounting components, sector specific elements for inclusion in existing actions such as EMAS, sector specific monitoring, recording and oversight protocols. These sector specific packages would then be used by individual businesses or companies at the national or local level to make a commitment/contract through partnerships in relation to biodiversity protection.

The identification of the Business sectors could be based on an assessment of how different businesses can contribute to the actions and the attainment of the objectives of the Biodiversity Action Plan, to help ensure the added value in EU context. Different categories of businesses (e.g. extractive industries, construction, transport, tourism, food chain supplies, agribusiness etc) have a different role in achievement of the objectives/targets (See attached table 1 to be developed in consultation with stakeholders).

We will consider the possibility that during a first stage, the EU platform could be financed through EU funds. However, at a later date, the initiative should become self financing. We could also explore to what extent Business would be prepared to underwrite the functioning of the EU platform.

3) Full Implementation.

As the platform progressively developed the sector specific packages, these would be handed on to national agencies that would have the responsibility to promote the initiative in each Member State. Contracts entered into at the national level would be "registered" with the EU platform. The EU platform would also track the implementation and record and quantify the biodiversity benefits. The initiative could also have a management board or a board of governors comprised of Business, NGOs, academics and officials who would oversee the development and implementation of the initiative.

Past events

- Consultation meeting on 9 November 2006, organized by the Commission, involving several stakeholders.
- The Biodiversity Expert Group (BEG) on 7 March 2007 - Initial exchange of views with Member States and biodiversity experts indicated strong support for the initiative.

Timetable of future events

- Meetings with stakeholders on 28 and 29 March 2007 – Two consecutive technical workshops organised by the Commission.
- Nature Directors' meeting in Potsdam in 14-16 May 2007 under German Presidency - Consultation.
- Green Week in June 2007 - A debate session on 'Business and Biodiversity' to consider proposals for the initiative.
- Different *forums* (ex. WBCSD event – June 2007, Croatia) - Promotion of the Initiative.
- Technical workshops - Possibly further meetings with specific sectors based on outcome of earlier discussions.
- The Portuguese Presidency Conference in Lisbon 12-13 November 2007 - Excellent forum to present the outcome of these considerations and to work towards the launch of an initiative aimed at reaching the 2010 target.
- Nature Directors' meeting in Lisbon in 29-30 November 2007 under Portuguese Presidency - Consultation.
- The EU Summit in Brussels (December 2007) or/and Environment Council in December 2007 - The Portuguese presidency and the Commission will report back to on progress made under the initiative and submit to the Council possible follow-ups.

- CBD Thirteenth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-13), 18-22 February, 2008, Rome, Italy - Progress made under the initiative, including the outcome of the Lisbon conference, will be reported and negotiated to be incorporated into relevant recommendations, as appropriate.
- CBD COP9 in Bonn, Germany on 19-30 May 2008 during the Slovenian Presidency - Progress made under the initiative, including the outcome of the Lisbon conference, will be reported and negotiated to be incorporated into relevant decisions, as appropriate.
- The IUCN World Conservation Congress "A diverse and sustainable world" in Barcelona on 5-14 October, 2008 – Progress to be reported.

Annex 1

The role of Business in achievement of the objectives and targets of the Biodiversity Action Plan – *framework table to be developed in consultation with stakeholders*

Action Plan		Business type											
Objectives		Agri-	Fish-	Forestry	Extractive	Constructn	Transport	Tourism	Finance	Insurance	Retail	Energy	etc
1	Most important habitats & spp.	***	***	***	**	**	***	*				***	
2	Wider countryside	***		***			***					***	
3	Wider marine		***				***						
4	Regional & territorial develmt.				***	***		***					
5	IAS	**	**	**			**	*					
6	Intl governance												
7	External assistance												
8	Trade												
9	Climate change												
10	Knowledge base												
Supporting measures													
1	Finance								***	***			
2	Decision-making												
3	Partnerships	***	***	***	***	***	*	**	***	**	**		
4	Education, awaren, participn												
Monitoring, evaluation, review													
	Annual reporting												
	Indicators												
	Monitoring												
	Evaluation and review												

* low / * medium / *** high

