



The regional and federal ministers express themselves in support of biodiversity

20 May 2016, Brussels, Belgium

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the ratification by Belgium of the Convention on Biological Diversity all competent ministers reconfirm the importance of fighting the loss of biodiversity

Biodiversity is essential for our social and economic development.

Biodiversity is the basis of a wide array of ecosystem services, from the production raw materials to climate regulation. These represent an enormous natural capital, the contribution of which to our present and future society can hardly be overestimated. The increasing pressure by humankind on biodiversity however constitutes a threat to this capital. Policy reacts to this on all levels, such as by the ratification in 1996 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, now 20 years ago. On the occasion of this anniversary and of the International Day of Biological Diversity we reconfirm the importance of fighting the loss of biodiversity.

During the past twenty years important progress has been made.

During the first years of the Convention the focus was largely directed towards the protection of nature. This resulted in numerous laws and decisions, and also in a Belgian national biodiversity strategy, which has recently been updated.

Consequently all authorities have designated Natura 2000 zones as contribution to the European network of protected areas. With the adoption of a regional nature plan the Brussels Capital region has created a powerful tool to mobilize actors in favour of nature. The consolidation of the green network into the heart of the city is one of its major goals. Several additional tools have been proposed to promote the engagement of the public and to conclude new agreements. The Walloon nature network has as objective to connect present and new initiatives that promote biodiversity, and to reify our aim of creating synergies between all actors in the field.

In Flanders more than 12% is Natura 2000 protected area. Through intense consultation with stakeholders Flanders has adopted site-specific nature goals and priority measures. Almost 81,500 ha of Flanders are now under effective nature management, which is implemented in collaboration with other authorities, stakeholder groups and private owners. Through the vision “more, better and together” we collaborate with the private sector and local governments to expand green infrastructure, including in cities.

The federal government on its side has established a marine spatial plan for the Belgian part of the North Sea, which contains the largest Natura 2000 area. Moreover, a federal plan on bees has brought together all actors concerned, which allows for the designation of new measures.

Together with their European partners the Federal State and the Regions are finalizing a list of invasive alien species of special concern.

There still is a lot to do in the next twenty years.

We are fully aware that biodiversity is key to our present and future well-being and economic development. A well-documented policy is and remains a necessity to preserve and reinforce biodiversity, and restore it where necessary. For this the Convention on Biological Diversity is an important tool. Belgium has always actively supported the process and will continue to do so, both by actively following-up the Convention at the international level, as well as through actions on local, regional, federal, national and European levels.

We do not confine our view to our direct surroundings. Belgium takes into account the impact of its choices on biodiversity beyond its borders, in particular in the open seas and in developing countries. In the latter ecosystem services are of crucial importance for the livelihoods of the local population. Reinforcing the integration of biodiversity and development cooperation policies through the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is therefore a priority.

We call on all partners to develop initiatives together.

We realize that biodiversity policy does not stand on its own, but that we can only reach our goals if all sectors pay attention to actions that reduce our impact on biodiversity and that favour the protection of biodiversity. Reaching this mainstreaming of biodiversity is a major challenge, and a dialogue will be initiated to support it.

The economic and social dimension of biodiversity translates in attention to green infrastructure and to “green” and “blue” growth, which both have as goal to foster economic growth and development but also to ensure sustainable delivery of ecosystem goods and services, both on land and in the sea. Activities that specifically target companies are foreseen.

Further concrete initiatives are, amongst others, the unfurling of a nature plan for Brussels, the Walloon nature network (including the Maya-plan), and integrated management plans for both protected as well as non-protected areas in Flanders, the latter in collaboration with owners and cities. We are working on a federal plan to control illegal trade in wild species. Also the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, as national focal point biodiversity, is playing its part by launching the campaign “1001 for biodiversity” (see www.1001biodiv.be) together with the competent regional and federal authorities.

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