



“Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside” Intergroup EU Nature Restoration Targets: State of play and next steps

On 13 April 2021, the European Parliament’s “Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside” Intergroup hosted a high-level conference on **“EU Nature Restoration Targets: State of play and next steps”**, organised in conjunction with the European Landowners’ Organisation (ELO) and the European Federation for Hunting and Conservation (FACE).

The event was chaired by MEP Álvaro Amaro (Portugal, EPP), President of the Intergroup, with introductory remarks by MEP Simone Schmiedtbauer (Austria, EPP) and Alexander Bernhuber (Austria, EPP).

The opening message was delivered by **MEP Álvaro Amaro**, who underlined that restoration targets constitute a central element for the success or failure of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Further, he stressed that *“the involvement of regional and local stakeholders, either public or private – such as municipalities, NGOs or sectoral associations – will be key to ensure that restoration can translate into countless successful initiatives across Europe... We will not have results if we do not follow a holistic and bottom-up approach, which promotes an effective co-ownership of the political objectives and solutions sought”*.

MEP Simone Schmiedtbauer stated: *“I am convinced that a successful nature, species and habitat conservation can only be achieved through the active involvement of the people on the ground, the people directly concerned and affected: farmers, foresters, hunters and landowners – the rural community. All of their voices need to be heard and recognised. We need their will and support to achieve EU’s nature restoration targets”*.

MEP Alexander Bernhuber, Shadow rapporteur for the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 Initiative Report, said: *“We will all try to achieve a good report within the European Parliament, which will show that we all want to step up our ambitions on protecting biodiversity, but also to always keep in mind, that the proposed targets should be reached and achieved together with the Member States”*.

Stefan Leiner, Head of Unit, Natural Capital-Biodiversity, DG Environment, European Commission, recalling the overall policy context and key elements of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 presented the current state of play and timeline for developing the Commission proposal on legally binding nature restoration targets and referred to the ongoing impact assessment underpinning the proposal.

Justine Guiny, International Biodiversity Policy Officer at BirdLife International, stated that *“Following decades of permitting the exploitation and degradation of nature, there is so little of it left that conservation alone cannot undo the damage that has been done. To keep nature, and our planet alive, it is crucial that all*

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stakeholders unite around a common agenda that puts nature restoration as the central solution to the climate and biodiversity crises. What is needed urgently is an ambitious and binding restoration law, and a good implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy”.

Prof. Jordi Cortina-Segarra, Chair, European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration Department of Ecology and IMEM, Alicante University, explained that: *“Ecological restoration has progressed slowly over the last decade. A recent survey among European experts showed that there is wide consensus on the definition of effective ecological restoration and the barriers hampering its progress. Major barriers were largely related to low political priority and scarce and inadequate allocation of funding. Operational tools to implement participative and cost-effective ecological restoration at appropriate scales, measure its progress, and feedback into adaptive management loops are available”.*

Jurgen Tack, Scientific Director at ELO, underlined that *“it is essential to create a ‘partnership in the countryside’ so that we can combine scientific knowledge with the practices of managers and experience in the field. Voluntary measures and contractual agreements have often proven to be more effective than increasing regulation. Hence, promoting and incentivising local and community-based conservation will be an essential part of the new restoration targets. ELO welcomes the proposed investment priorities in Natura 2000 and green infrastructure and the European Commission’s exercise suggesting 20 billion euro/year be spent on nature. However, this is only a fraction of what would be needed to properly fund biodiversity. Synergies with other EU funding flows are particularly important and we know that they are not in themselves completely effective today”.*

With a high attendance of almost 300 online viewers and the additional intervention from **MEP Alex Agius Saliba** (Malta, S&D) who underlined the need to involve rural stakeholders and focus on habitats and ecosystems as these have been identified as a priority for restoration.

The meeting was moderated by **Dr. David Scallan**, FACE Secretary General, who also hosted a wide-ranging Q&A discussion.

Speaker presentations and video recording of the meeting are available on the “Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside” Intergroup’s website: www.biodiversityhuntingcountryside.eu/#events

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