



Convention on the Conservation
of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats

Standing Committee

Recommendation No. 206 (2019) of the Standing Committee, adopted on 6 December 2019, on nature-based solutions and management of protected areas in the face of climate change

The Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, in accordance with Article 14 of the Convention,

Having regard to the aims of the Convention to conserve wild flora and fauna and its natural habitats and to its requirements that Parties (1) take requisite measures to maintain the populations of wild flora and fauna at a level which corresponds in particular to ecological, scientific and cultural requirements, while taking account of economic requirements and (2) consider the conservation of wild fauna and flora in their planning and development policies, and in their measures against pollution;

Recalling all of the previous climate change related Recommendations of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention:

- No. 122 (2006) on the conservation of biological diversity in the context of climate change
- No. 135 (2008) and No. 143 (2009) on addressing the impacts of climate change on biodiversity
- No. 145 (2010) on guidance for Parties on biodiversity and climate change in mountain regions
- No. 146 (2010) on guidance for Parties on biodiversity and climate change in European islands
- No. 147 (2010) on guidance for Parties on wildland fires, biodiversity and climate change
- No. 152 (2011) on Marine Biodiversity and Climate Change
- No. 158 (2012) on Conservation translocations under changing climatic conditions and
- No. 159 (2012) on the effective implementation of guidance for Parties on biodiversity and climate change;

Recalling that in 2008, the Bern Convention stressed the need to adapt conservation work to the challenges of climate change, so as to minimise its impact on the species and natural habitats protected under the Convention;

Reminding that in 2009, the Bern Convention stressed the need for the development of adaptation strategies for maintaining and increasing ecosystem resilience, and for improving the ability of ecosystems to mitigate the effects of climate change whilst maintaining and increasing biodiversity;

Reminding that again in 2009, the Bern Convention called on Parties to make full use of the large potential for synergies and co-benefits between biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation, including ecosystem-based approaches;

Recalling the CBD COP Decision VII/11 on Ecosystem approach, the CBD COP Decisions X/31 on Protected Areas and X/33 on Biodiversity and climate change and its guidance, the Aichi Targets 10 and 15 on minimising pressures on vulnerable ecosystems and on enhancing their resilience to climate change, the CBD COP Decision XI/21 on Other matters related to biodiversity and climate change, the CBD COP Decision XIII/5 on Ecosystem Restoration - short term action plan and the CBD COP Decision 14/5 on Biodiversity and Climate Change and the Voluntary Guidance on the design and effective implementation of ecosystem-based approaches to climate change adaptation and disaster

risk reduction and Decision 14/8 on Protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures;

Recognising the EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy, particularly the strategic objective aiming at a more climate resilient, low-carbon economy and its Target 2 on maintaining ecosystems and their services and enhancing them by establishing green infrastructure and restoring at least 15 % of degraded ecosystems;

Recalling that the Global assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem services developed and adopted by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) in May 2019 in Paris, recognised climate change among the five main direct drivers of biodiversity loss today and also presented an array of root causes or indirect drivers of change which are in turn underpinned by societal values and behaviours;

Also recalling that the IPBES defines nature-based solutions as "*Actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems, that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits*" in the [glossary](#) to the Global Assessment of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services;

Recalling that the Special Reports¹ of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) demonstrated the biodiversity-climate change link and the important role of ecosystems for climate change mitigation and adaptation;

Recalling the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in particular SDG 13 calling for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, as well as SDGs 14 and 15 on the conservation of marine and terrestrial ecosystems;

Emphasising the clear interlinkages between the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and human rights, with respect to the intrinsic value of wild flora and fauna, which needs to be preserved and passed to future generations and which is essential for sustaining ecosystem services indispensable for human life and well-being and for the full enjoyment of all human rights;

Acknowledging the outcomes of the survey developed by the Bern Convention in 2018 on the needs of Contracting Parties on the management of protected areas from a climate change perspective, stressing that adaptation action lags far behind awareness across Emerald Network sites [document T-PVS/Inf(2018)12: Report on the survey on climate change and protected areas];

Acknowledging the recommendations formulated in the study on potential synergies concerning climate change between the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) and the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) developed in 2018 [document T-PVS/Inf(2018)11];

Acknowledging that it is widely recognised by Governments that a state of emergency now exists to avoid the breakdown of both the climate and biodiversity, as well as of ecosystems that support life on Earth as it has been known since the emergence of current civilisation, and recognising that the choices made now on both greenhouse gas emissions' reduction and biodiversity conservation and restoration targets determine the very nature of the planet and human society which will be passed on to future generations;

Acknowledging that the causes as well as impacts of climate change and disaster risk are strongly intertwined and that measures to adapt to climate change and to reduce disaster risks should be designed and implemented in a collaborative manner;²

¹ IPCC SR1.5 Special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty; IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C; IPCC SRCCL Special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems; IPCC SROOC Special report on the ocean and cryosphere in a changing climate.

² IPCC SREX Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation and the UNDRR Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 Sendai Framework for Action.

Aware that the current challenges require a change in approach to address the climate and biodiversity crisis, which are inextricably linked and interdependent in both cause and in solution, and particularly to address biodiversity conservation in the context of the trajectory of climate change;

Conscious of the growing global awareness that nature-based solutions with safeguards are an essential component for climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction, whilst also providing multiple benefits including for biodiversity and human health;

Stressing, however, the need to recognise the different definitions of nature-based solutions ranging from naturally occurring ecosystems, to solutions that copy nature and natural traits and abilities, hence acknowledging the need to focus on solutions that also maintain wildlife and their natural habitats;

Reminding of the nature-based solutions for climate Manifesto developed for the UN Climate Action Summit which took place on 23 September 2019 in which its supporters, including Governments, recognised the important role of nature in climate action and confirmed their commitment to unlock its full potential of nature through a range of actions;

Reminding that besides the multiple benefits it provides to people, photosynthesis by nature is the only proven, effective and low-cost instrument for CO₂ removal from the atmosphere, essential to meet Net Zero targets;

Reminding that nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches share the assumption that ecosystems in a healthy condition deliver multiple benefits and services for human well-being and address economic, social and environmental goals, including climate change adaptation and mitigation and biodiversity conservation and restoration;

Highlighting that ecosystem-based approaches to climate change adaptation and mitigation, including biodiversity conservation, the reduction of ecosystem degradation, restoration of ecosystems, and sustainable soil management (“nature-based solutions or “natural climate solutions”) could provide about one third of the cost-effective CO₂ mitigation by 2030 in order to have a greater than 66 per cent chance of limiting warming to below 2°C. These measures are generally more cost-effective and immediately accessible and thus could be implemented as “no-regret” priority actions;³

Welcoming the outcomes of the Joint meeting of the Groups of Experts on Biodiversity and Climate Change and on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks under the Bern Convention (Trondheim, 3-4 October 2019), which concluded that although climate change is impacting protected areas, this is not yet reflected in many site management plans, nor in strategic assessment of the network’s ability and opportunity to assist the adaptation of European biodiversity to climate change as a pan-European ecological network;

Acknowledging that funding for the management of the Emerald and Natura 2000 Networks and for adapting nature to climate change, for ensuring the continuation of ecosystem services and for scaling-up and effectively implementing nature-based solutions for mitigation and human adaptation to climate in harmony with nature is an investment in the future of our societies and will provide a profitable return in both economic and environmental accounting;

Aware that nature-based solutions need strong environmental and social safeguards;

Aware that the Emerald and Natura 2000 Networks are a vital asset from which to build a climate smart biodiversity network across Europe’s biogeographic regions, and which are also nature-based climate solutions;

Aware that nature conservation objectives may be required to move to robustly reflect more dynamic species, habitats and ecosystems as they respond to climate change;

Conscious that there is a need to imagine and evaluate future scenarios for biodiversity, ecosystem services and nature-based solutions with the trajectory of changing climate and develop appropriate adaptation responses and aware that the uncertainties inherent in such scenarios must not be a hindrance to action;

³ Source CBD/SBSTTA/23/3

Aware as well that adaptive response will require appropriate monitoring, learning and development of actions as experience is gained;

Aware of the need to act quickly (within 10 years according to the IPCC) and boldly and to trigger fast transformative change to avoid passing tipping points in the climate system of the Planet;

Recommends Contracting Parties to the Convention and invites Observer States to:

1. Urgently ensure regular inter-ministerial/inter-sectoral communication at national and local levels and bring senior stakeholders in Governments together, in view of promoting a multidisciplinary, integrated and inclusive approach to climate change action for both adaptation and mitigation and in particular nature-based solutions;
2. Invest and focus sectoral funding streams towards nature-based solutions, including within the management of the Emerald and Natura 2000 Network sites as well as protected areas in general, in view of unlocking nature's potential for climate change mitigation and adaptation and for providing multiple societal benefits;
3. Join the 'Nature-based solutions for climate Coalition', set up on the occasion of the Climate Action Summit of the United Nations in September 2019 and contribute to its follow-up work;
4. Develop and implement management plans for Emerald and Natura 2000 sites and protected areas in general, to adapt to the local and regional conditions of a significantly warmer world, taking the climate scenarios and their projected impacts, as developed by the IPCC, as critical reference, including to accommodate the biogeographical implications of climate change across the site network;
5. Use the Emerald and Natura 2000 Networks and protected areas in general to actively deliver a comprehensive range of ecosystem services, through their primary biodiversity objectives and the features for which they are designated and managed, and ensure they will continue to do so along the trajectory of climate change;
6. Expand existing protected areas and ecological networks to achieve win-win measures for adapting sites, habitats and species to climate change and for developing nature-based solutions to mitigate climate change and disaster risk reduction;
7. Seek to engage wider land management, beyond Emerald and Natura 2000 sites and other protected areas' boundaries, to adapt to climate change in ways that support biodiversity and habitats condition both in sites and in the wider countryside;
8. Promote climate change adaptation, climate mitigation and biodiversity conservation in agricultural and other relevant land management policies, thus enabling win-win measures and practices;
9. Analyse national protected areas and ecological networks to assess how they contribute to adaptation and mitigation challenges of climate change, including the reduction of disaster risks;
10. Develop strategic spatial planning for nature-based solutions/ecosystem-based approaches to climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction and green infrastructure implementation, thereby supporting and encouraging land managers to implement them;
11. Step up awareness-raising on the benefits of biodiversity and nature-based solutions in the context of climate change and disaster-risk reduction, aiming at closing the communication gap between scientists and conservation practitioners, policymakers, relevant sectors and businesses as well as contributing to multiple SDGs simultaneously;
12. Develop communication plans, including cooperation with media, social networks and other communication channels, to raise the awareness of the public and to draw the attention of decision makers on the importance of nature-based solutions, of considering local knowledge in disaster risk reduction strategies and in improving the prevention of natural hazards;
13. Promote formal and vocational education programmes for practitioners and managers which include climate adaptation management, both in and beyond Emerald and Natura 2000 Network sites and protected areas in general;
14. Report to the Standing Committee, in 2022, on the progress made in the implementation of this Recommendation.

Recommends to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and any other of its institutions, if relevant, to:

15. Seek ways to enhance and communicate the organisation's role in strengthening the links between environmental protection and human rights, the right to a healthy environment, the rights of future generations to a rich and diverse biological diversity and the relevant obligations of Governments, including by considering and strengthening the role of the Bern Convention which is the only Council of Europe Treaty on environmental matters with an operational monitoring mechanism in force;

Instructs the Secretariat to the Bern Convention, in cooperation with the Group of Experts on Biodiversity and Climate Change, the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks and the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas, to:

16. Advertise the existing Bern Convention standards, expert studies and reports on climate change and biodiversity and encourage that they are used by authorities, stakeholders and partners;
17. Develop, subject to the availability of financial resources, a knowledge exchange platform, making use of and building on existing ones,⁴ for guiding successful conservation of habitats and species protected through the Convention in the face of climate change and other pressures, in particular in Emerald Network sites through appropriate adaptive management;
18. Continue the Bern Convention's role in capacity building and collating and sharing of good practices and lessons learned in nature-based solutions and protected areas management with a climate change adaptation and mitigation component;
19. Ensure adaptive management in the context of climate change is included, as appropriate, in Resolutions for the award or renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas (EDPA);
20. Support the involvement of Emerald Network and EDPA sites in testing ways of scaling up and transferring nature-based solutions, as a response to climate change and for the prevention of natural disasters;
21. Continue to develop synergies with relevant actors and organisations to promote and scale up the implementation of nature-based solutions for climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

Instructs the Bern Convention Group of Experts on Biodiversity and Climate Change and invites the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) of the Council of Europe to:

22. Assist Contracting Parties in the implementation of this Recommendation, in particular the operational paragraphs 15 to 21, in collaboration with other international actors, NGOs and stakeholders and to monitor progress.

⁴ Eg. OPPLA <https://oppla.eu/about>