COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Convention on the Conservation

of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats

Standing Committee

Recommendation No. 216 (2022) of the Standing Committee, adopted on 2nd December 2022, on Risks associated with the use of invasive alien tree species as a Nature-based Solution to mitigate climate change.

The Standing Committee to the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, acting under the terms of Article 14 of the Convention,

Having regard to the aims of the Convention to conserve wild flora and fauna and its natural habitats;

Recalling that Article 11, paragraph 2.*b*, of the Convention requires parties to strictly control the introduction of non-native species;

Recalling the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Global Programme 2013-2016, adopted by the IUCN World Conservation Congress in September 2012, which aimed at halting biodiversity loss and applying nature-based solutions to conserve biodiversity;

Recalling its Recommendation No. 193 (2017) on the European Code of Conduct for Invasive Alien Trees;

Recalling the Regulation (EU) No. 1143/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species;

Recalling the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 which recognises the importance of nature-based solutions, such as protecting and restoring wetlands, peatlands and coastal ecosystems, or sustainably managing marine areas, forests, grasslands and agricultural soils, to be essential for emission reduction and climate adaptation;

Recalling the European Green Deal, which aims at being climate-neutral by 2050;

Recalling the Resolution on "Nature-based solutions for supporting sustainable development" adopted at the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, which provides an internationally agreed definition of nature-based solutions;

Conscious that invasive alien species are assessed as one of the five main direct drivers of biodiversity loss in the IPBES Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, approved by the IPBES Plenary at its 7th session in May 2019 in Paris, France (IPBES-7);

Conscious that that tree planting can help balancing anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, and that alien trees and well-managed planted forests of alien tree species can provide opportunities for adaptation to climate change and global change;

Conscious of the risks associated with the usage of invasive alien tree species as a Nature-based Solution to mitigate climate change;

Referring to the Position paper on the risks associated with the use of invasive alien tree species as a Nature-based Solution to mitigate climate change. [document T-PVS/Inf(2022)39] and the discussion held at the 42nd meeting of the Standing Committee;

Recommends that Contracting Parties:

1. Ensure transparency, access to information and inclusive participation, in their tree planting initiatives;
2. Prioritise conservation and protection of remaining natural forests, old-growth forest, and other types of wooded and tree-less habitats, such as wetlands, peatlands, grasslands, for biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation;
3. Protect existing forest and adopt adequate preventive measures to analyse and reduce the risk of negative impact from biotic and abiotic risks, including fire risks;
4. Restore degraded natural forest ecosystems, avoiding tree planting in naturally non-forested habitats, such as wetlands, peatlands, and grasslands, and prioritise areas that improve conservation value;
5. Be aware of, and adopt, whenever possible, the Ten Golden Rules[1] - supported by scientists from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBG Kew) and Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) - for reforestation to optimize carbon sequestration, biodiversity recovery and livelihood benefits;
6. Apply the precautionary principle and rigorous risk assessment for all new alien trees, in particular when these species do not have a documented history of planting with limited risk of escaping from plantation sites. Favour those trees species that are assessed as low risk in low risk areas for planting and avoid planting species that are on the EU or on national invasive alien species lists in the relevant territories;
7. Be aware of the documented existence of a time lag between first alien tree introduction and invasive behaviours as well as possible range-shift driven by anthropogenic climate-change;
8. Apply the precautionary principle and rigorous biodiversity safeguards to all large-scale tree-planting projects, and forest restoration initiatives - including those labelled as Nature-based Solutions and under the Bonn Challenge[2];
9. Promote the use of native and threatened tree species in reforestation/afforestation/restoration initiatives and highlight the risks of planting invasive alien tree species in areas rich in native, and especially endemic tree biodiversity;
10. Take into account these key principles within planning and when designing incentives, subsidies, to support the adaptation of forest, urban forest, and forestry to climate change.

[1] Di Sacco, A., Hardwick, K.A., Blakesley, D., Brancalion, P.H.S., Breman, E., Cecilio Rebola, L., Chomba, S., Dixon , K., Elliott, S., Ruyonga, G., Shaw, K., Smith, P., Smith, R.J., Antonelli, A., 2021. Ten golden rules for reforestation to optimize carbon sequestration, biodiversity recovery and livelihood benefits. Glob. Change Biol. 27, 1328–1348. https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.15498

[2] The Bonn Challenge is a global effort to bring 150 million hectares of deforested and degraded land into restoration by 2020 and 350 million ha by 2030. (https://bonnchallenge.org/) (www.decadeonrestoration.org)