



Towards the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030

EUROPARC reflections on Protected Area targets – April 2021

Preamble:

We are pleased to share here a coherent and constructive summary of ideas and inputs as emerged during the course of internal consultation and discussions with members towards the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the development of related criteria and guidelines. EUROPARC represents a wide range of Protected Areas (PAs) and managing authorities from all over Europe, with diversified perspectives, reflecting the variety of contexts in which each of them operates.

We hope the ideas presented here can contribute to further inform positions and to stimulate a constructive debate across Europe for a successful implementation of the Strategy.

Some general remarks:

EUROPARC **welcomes the high level of ambition of the EU Biodiversity Strategy** which, taking a wide **integrated land management approach**, recognizes and values the role of Protected Areas to contribute achieving substantial progresses for biodiversity.

The process described in the Strategy is not just about site designations and management, but also about coordinating the **setting of strategic national approaches** for better integrated landscape management, of which existing and new PAs, the Natura 2000 network, together with strict protection and restoration measures should be crucial pillars.

EUROPARC is willing to actively support the EC and Member States to ensure an effective involvement of Protected Areas in the process and contribute to the successful implementation of the strategy.

Criteria for the identification of areas under legal protection (30% target)

Looking at the implementation process, we consider **designations of new protected sites** as a **very valuable** and necessary tool, which we fully support. Nevertheless, taking stock of the experience of previous designations across Europe, **we shouldn't underestimate how controversial this might be**, when they will be implemented locally. This will be relevant both for new designations as for the raising of protection level in areas that have already been designated. For this we stress the **need to build ownership and support** for the process as a whole. It is crucial that designations are based on scientific criteria and evidence, but the interests and rights of communities and users will also have to be considered in the process, in order to achieve successful implementation and long-term benefits.

The completion and effective implementation of the Natura 2000 network, other than being an existing legal obligation, should be maintained as a matter of priority. We also consider crucial that the **values of existing PAs, which can effectively contribute to the targets, are**

identified and assessed since the beginning of the process, as this will give quick wins and would contribute to gain more support, before pushing things ahead.

There are PAs for which conservation may not be the “prima facie” legal reason for their designation, but landscape Protected Areas and others are indeed contributing towards the maintenance of biodiversity through their management actions. An integrated approach should be ensured: **improved biodiversity management should take place in all PAs, not just in those ONLY designated for conservation objectives**. For this, nationally designated PAs should be recognized as contributing to achieve the strategy target, as long as biodiversity is the precautionary principle under which all other land uses actions are measured – integrated landscape management oriented towards biodiversity. (For most PAs, especially landscape ones, like regional parks, long-term conservation of nature is one of their aims, even if not the only aim). We see more risks of excluding sites than to engage with sites in a process for improvement. Even though there is a clear need to ensure that minimum criteria to count for the target are respected.

We very much welcome and support the inclusion of priorities for the protection of biodiversity in **urban and peri-urban areas**. We would recommend the development and adoption of **specific sub-targets, measures and funds** to support natural Protected Areas located in urban regions and periurban contexts. Major European cities shall be actively engaged in the process.

Management effectiveness:

We consider Management Effectiveness to be a crucial point for the success of the whole process, as designations will not solve the problems on their own. The percentages of protection are an important target reference, but will not help to achieve successful results for biodiversity unless we make concrete progresses on management. On our views the focus should primarily be on the following core elements: **management planning, stakeholder engagement, capacity building and communication**.

Having in place processes and tools to monitor and assess Management Effectiveness is crucial, but this will not deliver better management per se. We need to **make sure managing authorities and managers** on the ground are **equipped with the adequate competencies** to deliver effective results. This is more than just resources. Protected Area staff need a growing range of technical skills, while managers need to provide professional leadership and direction to secure and wisely use the resources needed. A clear commitment is to be taken in this direction.

Good governance is a crucial pillar to achieve effective management. Here specific attention to be given to decision making processes and stakeholder engagement. Good governance shall drive working across sectors, to improve biodiversity overall, moving to a more sustainable and integrated management of resources, with **participatory processes**: involvement of interested parties, communities, youth, landowners, ngo, users...

Further, an inclusive and constructive **stakeholder engagement**, building trust and maintaining ongoing positive relationships, requires Protected Areas’ teams with mature communication skills. This will also require **inclusive management planning** models and

practices to be applied. Therefore, more than ever before, nature managers will have to be adept and skilled in the **management of people** and the formation of cooperative management partnerships.

Appropriate capacity, also in terms of financial resources and staffing to manage, monitor and guarantee enforcement, all in a wider network of PAs, will have to be taken into account and ensured.

Criteria for the identification of areas under strict protection 10% target

EUROPARC welcomes the specific target on strict protection and supports the proposed **definition**: *“Strictly protected areas are fully and legally protected areas designated to conserve (and/or restore) the integrity of biodiversity-rich natural areas with their underlying ecological structure and supporting natural environmental processes. Natural processes are therefore left essentially undisturbed from human activity”.*

Looking at the terminology, we suggest to rather refer to “strict protection” and “**areas being strictly protected**”, as we fear “strictly protected areas” may generate confusion: as we understand there is no intent to create a new designation category or management category, but rather **ensure more rigorous protection in some areas** (which may overlap with existing designated areas).

The dilemma between broadening or not the definition is clearly challenging. We share the view of the **need to increase areas in Europe where non-intervention is the primary approach**. Nevertheless, both for the success of the measures – in terms of conservation results (taking also into account climate change, invasive species and restoration requirements) – and for their applicability on the ground, we see the **need to foresee, also in strictly protected areas, some specific management activities, as long as necessary for the restoration and/or conservation of the habitats and species for whom the area has been designated**. Active management for biodiversity (as mowing, grazing, population control...) should **only be allowed for habitats or ecosystems for which non-intervention is not the appropriate approach**.

Strict protection and non-intervention does not mean inaction: activities designed to achieve the conservation objectives in a site should be allowed and implemented, including equitable management actions linked to pressures’ and threats’ reduction, visitors and local residents, and those restoration measures to make the non-intervention possible in future there. This includes measures to find solutions compatible with the ecological needs of the site, while recognising the needs and rights of people who have customarily used the area in question.

Funding:

Funding clearly remains an important element to ensure a successful implementation of the measures. For this, adequate resources will have to be considered to **support management, monitoring, capacity building and enforcement** of a wider European network of Protected Areas.