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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

30th meeting
Strasbourg, 6-9 December 2010

**Comments of the Standing Committee of the Bern
Convention on Recommendation 1918 (2010) of the
Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
on “Biodiversity and climate change”**

*Secretariat Memorandum
prepared by
the Directorate of Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage*

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1. At its 1086th meeting on 26 May 2010, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe examined Recommendation 1918 –(2010) of the Parliamentary Assembly on “Biodiversity and Climate Change” (see appendix 2) and agreed to communicate it to the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats for information and possible comments by 15 September 2010.
2. The Bureau is invited to examine the draft recommendation found in appendix 1, which has been already examined and amended by the Group of Experts on Biodiversity and Climate Change. The Bureau is invited to submit the enclosed opinion to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe if appropriate.

Appendix 1

COMMENTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE AND NATURAL HABITATS (BERN CONVENTION) CONCERNING RECOMMENDATION 1918 (2010) OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE ON “BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE”

The Standing Committee of the Bern Convention:

1. Welcomes Recommendation 1918 (2010) of the Parliamentary Assembly and agrees that climate change is having a serious impact on European species, habitats and landscapes, making them more vulnerable and posing a very serious threat to species and habitats protected by the Bern Convention;
2. Notes that a greater attention to biological diversity is necessary to mitigate climate change, as natural ecosystems including forests can act as carbon sinks and thus contribute positively to slow the increase of CO² in the atmosphere, which is believed to be one of the main causes of climate change;
3. Notes that climate change is a supplementary reason to further the world and European biodiversity agenda, as other unrelated phenomena having an impact on biodiversity (such as pollution, fragmentation of natural and semi-natural areas, intensification of agriculture and forestry, a growing urbanisation of the rural space and coastlines may reduce the natural ability of natural systems in Europe to adapt to the new climate conditions;
4. Considers that ecosystem-based adaptation is fundamental to link biodiversity and climate change policies and provide multiple benefits at comparatively low cost, and that appropriate conservation and sustainable use of ecosystems has to be an important part of any adaptation strategy because biodiversity and ecosystem services help societies adapt to the adverse effects of climate change;
5. Notes that the Bern Convention has pioneered European work on the issue of biodiversity and climate changes as it decided in 2006 to set up a Group of Experts to provide information and guidance to Parties in understanding climate change impacts and threats and to provide Parties with tools and support in developing appropriate adaptation measures in national policies regarding the species and habitats protected under the Bern Convention;
6. Supports efforts in the framework of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity to address the common drivers of biodiversity loss and climate change and understand, monitor and assess on the interlinkages between biodiversity climate change, land degradation and sustainable developments, encouraging ecosystem-based approaches to adaptation and mitigation to fully exploit co-benefits and promoting also education, public awareness, capacity building on the topic;
7. Invites governments to carefully consider the impacts of mitigation on biodiversity, as some of the measures proposed (such increase of windfarms and other non-carbon energy plants or biofuel cultures) may threaten biodiversity protected by the Bern Convention;
8. Invites governments to support Council of Europe work on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, in particular under the Bern Convention, as particularly relevant to help States better adapt to the challenges of climate change;
9. Invites governments to support increased synergies between the Framework Convention on Climate Change and biodiversity-related conventions;
10. Invites the Russian Federation and San Marino to consider ratifying the Bern Convention, thus joining the other Council of Europe Member States in their work on climate change and biodiversity..



Appendix 2

Parliamentary Assembly Assemblée parlementaire

Recommendation 1918 (2010)

Biodiversity and climate change

1. Depletion of biological diversity is currently taking place much faster than natural extinction.
2. Human activities are the main cause of this depletion, both directly (soil and marine pollution and the introduction of invasive species, etc.) and indirectly (exponential increase in climate change brought on by various activities).
3. The smooth functioning of ecosystems is vital to the well-being of humankind, as they provide free services such as water resources, soil fertility, firewood and timber, food, medicines, fossil, solar, wind and geothermal energy and climate regulation.
4. Global warming is a well established fact and an unprecedented challenge for biodiversity. Worldwide, it is also reflected in an increase in average air and sea temperatures, extensive snow and ice melt and rising average sea levels.
5. According to some experts, average temperatures on the Earth's surface could increase by 1.4 to 5.8° C by the end of the 21st century, with greater increases on land and in the high latitudes than at sea or in the tropics. Sea levels could rise by between 0.09 and 0.88 m and even, according to certain experts, much more. Precipitation is also expected to increase in the high latitudes and equatorial regions and to fall in the subtropics, with an increase in high rainfall. It is predicted that 20% of coastal wetlands could disappear by 2080 because of rising sea levels.
6. Modelling changes in biodiversity is difficult. However, it is obvious that climate change has serious repercussions for animal populations, the distribution of species and ecosystems. This also has an impact on the length of seasons, reproduction periods, animal and plant growth, animal migration, the geographical distribution of species and density of populations, the frequency of parasitic infestations and diseases, etc.
7. Changes in biological diversity in ecosystems and landscapes, which are caused by climate change or other phenomena (such as deforestation and forest fires) also, in turn, affect the climate by altering the absorption and emission of greenhouse gases in particular. In addition, changes in the structure of the biological communities in the upper layers of the oceans could alter their absorption of CO₂ or affect weather conditions and climate change. This is therefore a spiral-like process which could have disastrous results at global level.
8. The Parliamentary Assembly notes that there is very good evidence of the impact of climate change on species and habitats, making them all the more vulnerable. It underlines the fact that uncertainties concerning the precise effects of climate change on biodiversity should not be a reason

for deferring concrete action to preserve ecosystems and that the principle of precaution must be applied.

9. The Assembly underlines the need for the full and immediate implementation of the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

10. It points out that in April 2002, at the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, organised under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the governments undertook “to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth” (2010 Biodiversity Target).

11. The Assembly also draws attention to its Recommendation 1823 (2008) on global warming and ecological disasters, Resolution 1406 (2004) on global warming: beyond Kyoto, Recommendation 1883 (2009) and Resolution 1682 (2009) on challenges posed by climate change, Recommendation 1885 (2009) on drafting an additional protocol to the Convention on Human Rights, concerning the right to a healthy environment and [Recommendation 1862](#) on environmentally induced migration and displacement: a 21st-century challenge.

12. The Assembly also draws attention to Recommendation No. 135 (2008) of the Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention, ETS No. 104) on addressing the impacts of climate change on biodiversity, which calls on the contracting parties and observer states to address and communicate, as a matter of urgency the impacts of climate change on biological diversity and its conservation, inter alia, and to its Recommendation No. 143 (2009) on further guidance for parties on biodiversity and climate change, which calls inter alia on increasing efforts to improve understanding of the linkages between biodiversity and climate change.

13. It points out that the environment ministers of the G8 and emerging countries, meeting in Syracuse (Italy) in April 2009, adopted the Syracuse Charter on Biodiversity, making biodiversity a major global cause on a par with the fight against global warming and underlining the close link between the two.

14. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers calls on the governments of Council of Europe member and observer states to take account of the opportunities offered by the International Year of Biodiversity in 2010 to:

14.1. improve the interface between science and politics, particularly with regard to biodiversity, whose importance still seems to be underestimated by some policy makers and by a large proportion of the public;

14.2. devise appropriate policies and take concrete measures to promote the conservation of biological diversity and reduce the impact of climate change on biodiversity;

14.3. develop evaluation systems to improve our knowledge of how biological diversity interacts with ecosystem structure and functioning and deepen our understanding of how biodiversity reacts to climate change factors and other exogenous pressures;

14.4. encourage synergy and interaction between national, regional and local environmental projects and policies on climate change and the objectives of international treaties such as the Convention on Biological Diversity;

14.5. promote a more efficient transfer of best practices in preventing biodiversity loss, which is very important in ensuring that a co-ordinated response can be devised and implemented at European level;

- 14.6. develop education, information and participation programmes targeting the public and policy-makers concerning the value of biodiversity and the importance of the conduct of individuals, businesses and the authorities in preserving it and mitigating the impact of climate change.
- 14.7. step up the fight against illegal trading in fauna and flora;
- 14.8. fully respect the status of protected areas, extend them as far as possible and establish environmental corridors to link them, while focusing in particular on cross-border areas which are more vulnerable because of the considerations of territorial sovereignty that affect them;
- 14.9. ensure that the networks of protected areas and the environmental corridors between them improve possibilities for flora and fauna to adapt to climate change by means of migration;
- 14.10. not allow large infrastructure projects that would cut through, and thus destroy, the above-mentioned environmental corridors;
- 14.11. protect all old-growth forests, functioning wetlands and permanent grasslands/pasture lands as carbon stores and sinks and important habitats;
- 14.12. adapt forestry techniques in the forests used for economic purposes so as to reduce impacts on climate and biodiversity;
- 14.13. facilitate transition to sustainable agriculture which would produce quality products, maintain high nature value habitats and landscapes, and have low climate impact;
- 14.14. support the renewable energy developments that have a real effect on reduction of green-house gas emissions and no negative impacts on biodiversity, and in no way support “green-wash” projects;
- 14.15. co-ordinate the responses to climate change and biodiversity loss by different sectors to achieve synergy and avoid conflicting actions and duplication of efforts;
- 14.16. implement Recommendation No. 135 (2008) of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention on addressing the impacts of climate change on biodiversity, which sets out detailed guidelines for concrete action at all levels;
- 14.17. identify, on the basis of the experience acquired in the context of the activities conducted with a view to achieving the “2010 Biodiversity Target”, a common strategy for a common framework of activities “post-2010”.