

## **Biological Diversity / Biodiversity**

Biological diversity (biodiversity) is the term given to the variety of life on earth. Essentially, it covers all life on earth and the ecosystems, which support it. It comprehends wildlife, plants and domesticated crops and animals and their interface with humans. It covers traditional nature conservation but also the interaction between biodiversity and many other sectors/issues such as agriculture, fisheries, forestry, trade, biotechnology, biosafety and access to, and benefit sharing from, genetic resources. Biodiversity provides humans with food, fresh water, fuel, building materials, medicines etc. For this reason, biodiversity can be considered as the very raw material which sustains life on earth.

In his statement to COHAB, the first ever Conference on Health and Biodiversity in Galway on 23-25 August, 2005, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, said:

*“If we fail to use and conserve biodiversity in a sustainable manner, the result will be increasingly degraded environments, and a world plagued with new and more rampant illnesses, deepening poverty, and the perpetuation of patterns of inequitable and unsustainable growth. Unfortunately, our actions run the risk of taking humanity down this path. As the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment reported earlier this year, human activities are fundamentally changing the planet, perhaps irreversibly. Over the last fifty years, pollution, climate change, degradation of habitats and overexploitation of natural resources led to more rapid losses of biological diversity than at any other time in human history”.*

## **UN Convention on Biological Diversity**

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) resulted from the Earth Summit held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. Ireland signed the Convention in 1992 and ratified it in 1996. The CBD is pre-eminent amongst nature/biodiversity-related Conventions, both in terms of its widespread support (188 countries are Parties) and its comprehensive scope.

The main target of the Convention is to secure a significant reduction in the current rate of loss of biodiversity across the globe by 2010. The Convention has three objectives, which are:

- the conservation of biological diversity
- the sustainable use of its components; and
- the equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources.

By becoming a Party to the Convention, Ireland has committed itself to working at national level and to international measures to achieve the three objectives of the Convention.

Under the CBD, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety was adopted in January 2000. Ireland ratified the Protocol in November 2003. The objective of the Protocol is to provide a framework for the safe transfer, handling and use of Living Modified Organisms (LMOs) resulting from modern biotechnology that may have an adverse effect on the conservation of biological diversity, taking into account risks to human health. An LMO is essentially the same as the more popularly recognised Genetically Modified Organism (GMO).

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## **EU Target on Biodiversity.**

The EU, at the Gothenburg Summit of Heads of State and Government in 2001, set an even more ambitious target than that of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The EU target is now to halt, rather than to significantly reduce, the current rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010. The main vehicle available to the EU for this purpose is the EC Biodiversity Strategy, which was the subject of a comprehensive review under Ireland's Presidency of the EU in 2004. A Presidency Conference held in Malahide, Dublin, on the subject - "Biodiversity and the EU - Sustaining Life, Sustaining Livelihoods" - attracted participation from 22 Member States and a wide range of stakeholders across Europe, and adopted the ***Malahide Message***. This document represents a major contribution to the finalisation of the review of the EC Biodiversity Strategy. The intention is that the European Commission will bring forward proposals for re-focussed measures under the Strategy to assist in meeting the 2010 target, based on the ***Malahide Message***.

## **Ministerial Responsibility for Biological Diversity/Biodiversity**

Section 9 of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2000, places a statutory responsibility on the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to "*promote the conservation of biological diversity*".

## **Countdown 2010**

Ireland is affiliated to the IUCN, the World Conservation Union, which is currently promoting Countdown 2010, a broad alliance of Governments, State agencies, international organisations, non-governmental organisations and private sector interests which are being brought together to achieve the 2010 biodiversity targets.

Countdown 2010 involves awareness raising; development of monitoring strategies and indicators; promotion of information and data; and promotion of regional and national action. During its Presidency of the EU, Ireland was pleased to be able to facilitate the European Launch of Countdown 2010 at its Biodiversity Stakeholder Conference, organised jointly with the European Commission, in Malahide in May, 2004.

## **National Biodiversity Plan 2002-6**

The National Biodiversity Plan is the main vehicle by which Ireland is meeting its commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the EC Biodiversity Strategy. The Plan was approved by Government and published in April 2002. Its

implementation is overseen by an Inter-Departmental Steering Group. The Plan contains 91 Actions aimed at securing the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in Ireland, and where possible its enhancement, and also to contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity globally.

A key concept of the Plan is that Government Departments and agencies, individuals, communities, non-governmental organisations, regional and local authorities all share responsibility for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

The focus of the National Biodiversity Plan is, therefore, to integrate biodiversity concerns into all sectoral activities over time.

The ninety-one Actions in the Plan are broken down and divided into the following categories:

- Integration of Biodiversity into Sectors (11 actions, nos. 1 to 11)
- Legislation (3 actions, nos. 12 to 14)
- Protected Areas (10 actions, nos. 15 to 24)
- Species Conservation (6 actions, nos. 25 to 30)
- Habitat and Ecosystem Conservation (1 action, no. 31)
- Countryside Conservation, (3 actions, nos. 32 to 34)
- Conservation and Sustainable Use of Genetic Diversity (3 actions, nos. 35 to 37)
- Biosafety - Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) (2 actions, nos. 38 and 39)
- Knowledge: Identification, Monitoring and Research (5 actions, nos. 40 to 44)
- Public Awareness and Education (2 actions, nos. 45 and 46)
- EU, Regional and International (10 actions, nos. 47 to 56)
- Terrestrial Ecosystems: Agriculture (8 actions, nos. 57 to 64)
- Terrestrial Ecosystems: Forests (14 actions, nos. 65 to 78)
- Inland Waters and Wetlands (6 actions, nos. 79 to 84)
- Marine and Coastal (7 actions, nos. 85 to 91).

## **Interim Review of the Implementation of the National Biodiversity Plan 2002-2006**

An Interim Review of the National Biodiversity Plan was launched by Minister Dick Roche T.D. in November 2005. This review outlines the level of progress we have made in implementing the 91 actions of the National Biodiversity Plan and identifies the areas where further efforts are required.

**<http://www.npws.ie/media/Media,3751,en.pdf>**

**<http://www.npws.ie/Biodiversity/Ireland/>**

## **Malahide Conference**

"Biodiversity loss continued at alarming rates, in the EU and globally, with serious potential consequences for sustainable livelihoods and sustainable economic growth. Heads of State and Government have made commitments (EU Spring Council 2001, World Summit for Sustainable Development 2002) to halt this decline in the EU and significantly reduce the current rate of loss globally by 2010. Little more than five years remain to meet these targets. This Conference was the key event in a critical policy review process which was widely endorsed by the Commission, Member States and civil society organisations. The Conference presented the opportunity to focus EU action in time to meet the 2010 biodiversity targets. The Conference, which brought together experts from the key sectors affecting biodiversity, from the European Commission, Member States and civil society, prepared a 'Message from Malahide's detailing priority objectives, targets, indicators of success and implementation arrangements. A rapid response to the Message is necessary from all key stakeholders if the 2010 targets are to be met."

**[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/develop\\_biodiversity\\_policy/malahide\\_conference/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/develop_biodiversity_policy/malahide_conference/index_en.htm)**