

The European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy (EPBRS)

Mission

The European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy is a forum for scientists and policy makers to ensure that research contributes to halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010.

Objectives

The EPBRS strives to promote strategically important biodiversity research with concern for reduction of biodiversity loss, conservation, protection, restoration and sustainable use of the components of biodiversity. The EPBRS is an important element in the European Research Area (ERA) for biodiversity research¹.

By the end of the 6th Framework Programme EPBRS

- should be the main European forum at which prominent natural and social scientists, influential policymakers and stakeholders exchange views and combine forces to plan, implement and exploit the research needed to underpin the conservation and sustainable use of components of biodiversity in Europe.
- should be widely known and its activities widely appreciated by the science community and by the science policy makers of the EU and Associated States.
- should produce agreements that collectively have a significant impact in the Commission, Council and Parliament on the debate on the follow-up to the 6th framework programme.
- should provide helpful science policy advice for the European delegations to the CBD and to the Council Environment working group (biodiversity).
- should be the natural contact point for relevant organisations with a similar mandate outside Europe, and should provide support for a co-ordinated European contribution to international programmes such as ICSU² and initiatives such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment³.
- should have become the **“European voice in biodiversity science policy”**.

¹ The ERA was established to encourage networking and co-operation, and to build a research equivalent of the common market by improving the co-ordination of research activities and the convergence of national and EU research policies.

² The International Council for Science (ICSU) is an international non-governmental association of natural scientists that works to identify and address major issues of importance to science and society.

³ The MA (2001-2005) is designed to improve the management of the world's ecosystems by providing scientific information to meet the needs of decision-makers.

Context

The main policy frameworks for the EPBRS are common EU policies including in particular science research policy, the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the 6th Environmental Action Programme, the EU environmental Directives (notably the Birds⁴, Habitats⁵ and Water Directives⁶), the Convention on Biological Diversity and the various national biodiversity action plans.

The EPBRS depends on continued political support, resources and commitment from Member States and on the commitment of its participants. The EPBRS will continue to develop as long as it can satisfy the following three types of interests:

- the interests of the research community in influencing the EC Framework Programmes, improving research networks, understanding policy needs for research and contributing to the policy process;
- the interests of the EC and Member States in helping to ensure the relevance to policy and public benefit of publicly-funded science in Europe;
- the interests of the successive EU Presidencies in promoting their own biodiversity research agenda in Europe and raising the profile of biodiversity research domestically.

The success of EPBRS depends on its visibility in the political landscape in Europe and on its ability to deliver relevant products at the right time and to the right people.

This document outlines the issues involved in developing the EPBRS into the future.

Status

The EPBRS is and should remain an informal body that keeps close connections with the EU institutions, national governments, and relevant international bodies.

Since its inception in 1999, the agendas of the meetings of the EPBRS have tried carefully to balance science and policy. The scientific flavour of the meeting is important to ensure that all participants enjoy sufficient depth of understanding to discuss the substantive issues constructively.

The organisers of the successive meetings of the EPBRS have set the work programme. The themes addressed in the meetings have been chosen because they are of particular relevance to the organising country, while also having a European relevance. In some cases they were also chosen because they were important items on forthcoming CBD meetings. Thus the group has dealt with Northern dimensions of biodiversity, islands and archipelagos, invasive organisms, water and forest, biodiversity conservation, Mediterranean biodiversity, scientific monitoring of biodiversity and sustainable use of biotic resources. It has approached these topics with the aim of identifying scientific work of policy relevance that is needed to support the implementation of the CBD, the EU Directives on Birds and Habitats, EU and national Biodiversity Action plans, NATURA 2000, and the EC Clearing House Mechanism.

The agreements of successive meetings, the main tangible deliverable, have focused on the thematic issue under discussion. Other deliverables either do, or will in the future, include abstracts of EU research, syntheses and summaries of relevant news, proceedings of EPBRS meetings, and such elements as guidelines for conservation research and implementation.

⁴ Council Directive 79/409/EEC

⁵ Council Directive 92/43/EEC

⁶ Council Directive 2000/60/EC

The EPBRS is a recognised and acknowledged participant in EU discussions of biodiversity science strategy and policy. This success is partly due to networking and linking activities, less tangible, but nevertheless highly important deliverables.

The EPBRS encourages and helps to establish national platforms, whose forms and functions are adapted to the needs and administrative landscape of their country. In this activity, it is strongly supported by the thematic network “BioPlatform”⁷, funded by the European Community to provide scientific, logistic and financial support to the activities of the EPBRS.

Work Programme and Deliverables

The work programme aims to achieve the mission statement by focusing on aspects of science policy and science issues relevant to wider policy:

- identifying **policies** for which biodiversity science knowledge is important
- identifying significant **gaps** in knowledge that reduce the effectiveness of policy
- identifying resulting **issues** of major importance for biodiversity science policy
- establishing **priorities** for biodiversity research in Europe
- promoting **communication** between scientists and end-users

This is achieved by:

- identifying a set of **topics** that should be discussed by the EPBRS at its meetings
- identifying best practice in converting priority wish lists into science action plans
- identifying and implementing best practice in getting science action plans onto **policy** and **funding** agendas
- identifying and implementing best practices in building effective **science-policy interfaces**.

Membership, organisation and funding

Membership in the EPBRS is open to all states that participate in the 6th Framework Programme and to the European Union Institutions. The EPBRS is also open by invitation to organisations whose mission involves them in biodiversity science policy at a European scale. Other stakeholders are invited to participate at appropriate meetings.

The individuals who attend the meetings are recommended by the participating state⁸. EPBRS participants must have the national contacts or influence to guarantee that the agreements of the meetings will be delivered and explained to the relevant authorities within their countries.

The strength of the EPBRS lies in its members, among whom are several national delegates to SBSTTA. At present the delegations from each participating state comprise one scientist and one policymaker, and the scientific representation is almost entirely drawn from the biological

⁷ BioPlatform members come from AT, BE, CH, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GR, IE, IT, NL, NO, PT, SE, SK, UK, BG, CY, CZ, EE, HU, LT, LV, MT, PL, RO, and SI. It helps the EU presidency host country and the Commission to organise EPBRS meetings. It also runs electronic conferences in preparation of the EPBRS meetings, and organises the deliverables produced by the EPBRS. See <http://www.bioplatform.info/> for more details.

⁸ This is achieved by asking the relevant Programme Committee to recommend participants.

sciences.⁹ To contribute to the social science expertise of the body, the Commission invites some socio-economic experts to participate *ad personam* in the EPBRS.

The bi-annual EPBRS meetings have been systematically linked to the EU presidency. The maintenance of this status and the continuity of the meetings are pivotal to the success of EPBRS.

EPBRS can only be effective if work goes on between meetings, not only to prepare the meetings themselves, but also to follow them up and to undertake the necessary work identified during the course of the meetings. Such homework has resource implications that the governments or other organisations should take into account when they mandate staff to participate in EPBRS. This could be seen as a “shared cost contribution” of the organisations employing EPBRS participants.

External funding is sought to allow the EPBRS to function as an independent body. It could become part of a federation of National Biodiversity Platforms, driven by a common goal to encourage the convergence of biodiversity research on policy needs in the EU.

The EPBRS Steering Group is responsible for discussing the political and strategic orientation and activities of the EPBRS, and for making suggestions to the EPBRS to help to improve the relevance and impact of its work. Discussions are ongoing with one of the Member States to try to establish a permanent secretariat to build and maintain close links with relevant EU institutions including those that are responsible for sectors such as forestry, agriculture, fisheries and industry, so crucially important for sustainable development. The secretariat would also manage a future EPBRS website, when it is separated from the Bioplatform portal.

Contacting the EPBRS

The EPBRS can be contacted via the Secretary of its Steering Group, Dr Martin Sharman

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A list of EPBRS agreements to date is provided in Annex 1 to this document.

⁹ At present Bioplatform partners are invited to participate at the EPBRS meetings. Their costs are covered by Bioplatform. Note that many but not all Bioplatform members are EPBRS members.

Annex 1: Agreements and recommendations

EPBRS-PT2000-Declaration-(Final).doc
EPBRS-FR2000-Biological Invasions-(Final).doc
EPBRS-SE2001-Water Forest-(Final).doc
EPBRS-BE2001-Scientific tools-(Final).doc
EPBRS-ES2002-Mediterranean-(Final).doc
EPBRS-GR2003-BioticResources-(Final).doc
EPBRS-GR2003-Sustainable Use (01-0).doc
EPBRS-GR2003-Sustainable Development (01-0).doc
EPBRS-GR2003-Protected areas-(01-0).doc
EPBRS-GR2003-Health-(01-0).doc
EPBRS-GR2003-EcosystemApproach(01-0).doc
EPBRS-GR2003-Climate change-(01-0).doc
EPBRS-IT2003-GeneticBiodiversity-(Final).doc
EPBRS-PL2003-Acceding Countries-(Final).doc
