

REGENERATION OF NATURE

Posted on 13/09/2024 by Naider

The European Union's new legislation on nature restoration, a [regulation](#) that changes the paradigm of environmental protection across the continent, has been adopted with no small amount of difficulty and in extremis.

In a way, this new regulation recognises the inadequacy of current conservation policies and commits to strengthening them through an active restoration policy.

Thirty years ago, the Natura 2000 network was created to extend nature conservation policy beyond large wild nature reserves concentrated in specific geographical locations. The idea was to create a network of smaller, unconnected sites of significant ecological value. Since then, countries have been declaring areas of special conservation interest, although these areas have not always had effective plans to improve the ecosystem, and sometimes have not even had adequate conservation plans.

Despite these efforts, the Natura 2000 network and natural or national parks have not been significantly extended beyond less accessible areas such as mountains, wetlands or coastal areas. This has limited the protection of a wider range of ecosystems.

The regulation goes beyond traditional protection by recognising that nature in a good state of conservation should be present in more areas of the territory, not just in less anthropogenic areas. It allows for the restoration of historically degraded ecosystems, such as valley or riparian forests.

The new law has been criticised [by the agribusiness lobby](#), which fears that the new measures could affect its interests. However, on a continent that is a [leader in food exports](#) and faces high levels of [food waste](#), food security concerns have not been a strong enough argument to stop the law. Moreover, the regulation is designed to benefit agri-food systems in the medium to long term, in line with the recommendations of the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report.

The main requirements oblige member states to restore 20% of degraded terrestrial ecosystems and 20% of the marine environment by 2030. The target is extended to all ecosystems in need of intervention by 2050. It also includes specific targets such as reversing the decline of pollinators by 2030, maintaining urban green spaces by 2030 and increasing them by 5% by 2050, removing river barriers so that at least 25,000 km of European rivers are free-flowing by 2030, and halving the use of chemical pesticides by 2030 by banning them in sensitive areas such as urban green spaces and natural areas of special interest for pollinators.

The Regulation also seeks to renaturalise cities by promoting green infrastructure and [nature-based solutions](#) to increase these areas, as well as urban woodlands. A step forward that could be more ambitious and have stronger enforcement mechanisms to ensure its success and compliance.

Each state government will decide on the specific measures to be implemented in its territory, which should be included in its national restoration plan. This plan should identify the restoration needs and actions necessary to meet the obligations and achieve the targets set.

The paradigm shift represented by this legislation is significant. The effectiveness of these measures will depend on the commitment and determination of all Member States, as well as cooperation between governments, communities and industries.

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