

Call for a science-based approach concerning the EU Regulation on Invasive Alien Species

Invasive alien species (IAS) are responsible for damage to biodiversity, ecosystem services, economies and human well-being. It is estimated that the damage caused by IAS in the EU is more than 12 billion Euros yearly.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Aichi Biodiversity Target 9 calls for: “By 2020, invasive alien species and pathways are identified and prioritized, priority species are controlled or eradicated and measures are in place to manage pathways to prevent their introduction and establishment”. The EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 incorporated this objective in Target 5.

In September 2013, the European Commission published its proposal for an EU Regulation to tackle the problem of IAS ([COM\(2013\) 620 final](#)).

We, scientists and experts in the field of biological invasions and the conservation of biodiversity, believe that EU-wide legislation on IAS will be a critical tool in tackling the problems that IAS pose in Europe.

The signatories to this Call welcome this important step and recognise that a coordinated international framework is essential for effective action at EU and national levels.

A coherent system based on the principles of the CBD (prevention; early detection and rapid response; eradication; control) is the best approach to achieve the objectives of conserving biological diversity and minimising the socio-economic impacts of IAS.

However, some elements of the current proposal should be strengthened in order not to severely hamper the core measures and reduce efficacy of action against IAS. Failing to effectively address IAS would mean failing to meet the CBD and EU targets, and would represent a missed opportunity to address a major driver of biodiversity loss.

We believe that strategies and policies on IAS should be guided by the best available knowledge to ensure that action is taken where most needed.

We call for attention to the following elements of the proposed Regulation:

1. Rapid adoption of the proposed Regulation will benefit biodiversity, ecosystem services and human well-being since the rate of invasions continues to increase and any delays will worsen the current situation. Biological invasions in the EU, present and future, need to be urgently tackled under an effective legal framework.
2. Successful prevention can only be achieved through the implementation of the precautionary approach. Therefore, border controls and import restrictions on species of high invasion risk or known to have caused problems elsewhere should be implemented.
3. Establishing a list of IAS of EU concern is a potentially effective tool. However, limiting this ‘black-list’ to 50 species only, as it is proposed, has no scientific base and represents only 3% of the 1,500 IAS estimated to be present in the EU already.
4. The cap to the list appears even more limiting, considering that the list should also include species not yet present in Europe. Such a cap should be removed and risk-assessments should lead the process for identifying priority species.
5. Freezing the list for five years after its adoption (realistically until 2020) would delay the effectiveness of the legislation, because the problems of IAS are particularly dynamic and context-dependent – action may be urgently required on new species as they are detected, introduced or start to become invasive. Therefore the list of IAS of EU concern should be flexible, responsive and updated as frequently as needed.

6. Input and advice from scientists, for instance through the establishment of a Scientific Review Group, should inform the development and updating of the list.
7. Many Member States have adopted legislation regulating domestic trade and possession, and the EU Regulation should not constrain these efforts. Member States should continue to have the possibility to introduce and update national 'black-lists' that not only regulate the release into the environment of listed species, but also their trade, possession, transport, reproduction and management.
8. The Regulation should encourage voluntary approaches, such as the development and adoption of voluntary codes of conduct which would complement regulatory actions.
9. A surveillance system, as proposed in the draft Regulation, should have scientific validation and should contribute towards the establishment of the list of indicators recommended by CBD's Aichi Biodiversity Target 9 and developed at EU level (SEBI 2020).
10. To further improve public engagement, a system should be established to allow for stakeholder participation in the process at the three levels, from prevention through early detection to long-term management and control.

About the initiators of this Joint Call

BirdLife International is a worldwide partnership of 121 conservation organisations working to protect the world's birds and their habitats. With more than 4,100 staff in Europe, 2 million members and tens of thousands of skilled volunteers, BirdLife Europe – based in Brussels – supports the European and Central Asian Partnership of BirdLife International, present in 48 countries and all the EU Member States. www.birdlife.org

IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, is the world's oldest and largest global environmental organization with more than 1,200 government and NGO members and almost 11,000 volunteer experts in some 160 countries. The Invasive Species Specialist Group (ISSG) is a global network of about 200 scientific and policy experts on invasive species from over 40 countries, organized under the auspices of the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of IUCN. www.iucn.org, www.issg.org

NEOBIOTA, the European Group on Biological Invasions, is a consortium of scientists and environmental managers aiming to enhance integration of invasion research and strengthen approaches to counteract negative effects of introduced organisms on biodiversity, ecosystem services and human health. It publishes 'NeoBiota', a peer-reviewed, open-access, online journal covering research on alien species and biological invasions. www.oekosys.tu-berlin.de/menue/neobiota/

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2. Asociación Herpetológica Española (AHE)
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5. East and South European Network for Invasive Alien Species (ESENIAS)
6. European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA)
7. European Squirrel Initiative (ESI)
8. European Weed Research Society (EWRS)
9. Grupo de Aves Exóticas (SEO/BirdLife) (GAE)
10. Grupo Especialista en Invasiones Biológicas (GEIB)
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12. Institute of Environmental Sciences (CML)
13. International Association of Botanic Gardens (IABG)
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