

Achievements of the European Task Force on Banking, Business and Biodiversity

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Introduction

This is a brief review of the achievements so far of the European Task Force on Banking, Business and Biodiversity, and a reflection on future possibilities. The Task Force was established following a decision of the second Intergovernmental "Biodiversity in Europe" conference, in Budapest. Its mandate was reinforced by the 4th Ministerial Environment for Europe Conference, in Kyiv. The Task Force frequently reported to the Council of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy, UNEP, the European Commission and the Council of Europe.

The history of the Task Force is that of the remarkable work done thanks to the support of many of the members. In particular, it is important to note the contribution of the Swiss Agency for Environment, Forests and Landscape, the Ministry of Environment and Water of Hungary, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality of The Netherlands, the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs of the United Kingdom, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Rabobank Nederland and the United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for Europe.

Past and present situation

The aim of the Task Force has been to:

- bring together stakeholders that are interested in organizing financing for business investments related to conserving biodiversity, and
- encourage financiers (bankers and otherwise) and policy workers (principally at the European level) to take measures for promoting the establishment of a Biodiversity Financing Facility (BFF)

Since the first exploratory meeting in autumn 2002¹, the Task Force has:

- developed with the particular support of the EBRD a concept for a BFF, to be underpinned by a Biodiversity Technical Assistance Facility (BTAF);
- discussed with the European Commission (DG Environment) ways to underwrite the pilot operations of the BTAF, referred to as BTAU (Biodiversity Technical Assistance Unit). The European Commission now provides financial support to a project aiming at developing the BTAU. The project is led by RSPB together with ECNC and various partners, including BirdLife;
- promoted the issue of banking and biodiversity including BFF in several events external to the Task Force meetings, including meetings of the PEBLDS Council, the 4th Ministerial Environment for Europe Conference in Kyiv, 2003 and Inter-governmental “Biodiversity in Europe” Conferences.

As regards the issue of banking and biodiversity the last aim to fulfil is the establishment of a BFF. In this regard there exist already several prototypes:

- EBRD support in developing a BFF facility for Poland with involvement of FFI;
- Hungarian Development Bank establishment of biodiversity-related investment support programme, with support of ECNC and the Hungarian Ministry of Environment and Water, and advice from EIB;
- ECNC survey on investment support requirements in Bulgaria and Croatia, supported by the Dutch BBI Matra programme, which will lead to the design of an appropriate financing mechanism.

A European-level BFF, fully backed by one or several financial institutions, relayed at the local level by a network of financial intermediaries, remains to be agreed upon and implemented. As such a financial mechanism depends upon a successfully operating (and financially supported) BTAF.

Future options

As regards the future of the European Task Force on Banking, Business and Biodiversity there are basically two options:

Option 1: Focus on BTAF. The coming period will be a time for the pilot BTAU to prove that it is a valid instrument to support a BFF. In the light of the outcome, it is likely that the Task Force will wish to recompose its membership according to the needs for the preparation, conclusion and implementation of a multi-lateral agreement on a BFF. A possibility is to transform the Task Force into a Standing Committee which would maintain relations with the stakeholders who have participated in the Task Force.

Option 2: Focus on BTAF and take up new challenges in the field of business and biodiversity. The European Commission wishes to prioritise the relationship between business and biodiversity and under the Portuguese Presidency of the EU in the second semester of 2007 there is a European Biodiversity and Business conference planned in Lisbon. These developments would be a propitious occasion for a review of the ongoing work of the Task Force and BTAF (a Toolkit for the pilot Biodiversity Technical Assistance Units should be ready by then) and other relevant topics being financed or undertaken by the Task Force representatives and their partners.

On 20 March 2007, the President of the Task Force, Sir Brian Uwin, has sent a letter to the members of the Task Force, asking them to provide their views on the matter. In the coming months the Task Force will consider the proper way to carry forward the work of the Task Force, while also consulting the Council of PEBLDS, the European Commission and UNEP.