



*EU Environmental Policy Briefing**

Commission Outlines Possible Policy Options for the Upcoming EU Strategy on Invasive Species

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In its Biodiversity Action Plan adopted in 2006 (COM(2006) 216), the EU committed itself to develop a Community strategy to address invasive alien species (IAS). As a first step towards this Strategy, the Commission adopted a Communication ‘Towards an EU Strategy on Invasive Species’¹ (COM/2008/789) on 3 December 2008. The aim of this Communication is to outline the potential policy options for the EU Strategy and initiate a wide discussion on its possible scope and content.

The Communication starts by drawing up a clear case for EU action on IAS. It provides evidence of the known negative effects of IAS in Europe, including impacts on ecology, economic activities and human health. The Communication estimates the monetary value of the damage caused by IAS and the necessary control measures to be at least €12 billion annually in Europe, based on initial results by IEEP².

As regards possible policy options for the EU Strategy, the internationally agreed ‘three-stage-hierarchical-approach’ to IAS forms the basis of the Commission’s thinking. This approach aims to control the spread of IAS through measures that focus on: 1) prevention; 2) early detection and rapid eradication; and 3) long-term control and containment. Priority is given to measures that aim to ensure effective prevention of further IAS introductions to and within the EU.

Finally, the Communication puts forward four possible policy responses to tackling IAS in the EU. These options are described in order of increasing intervention, however, according to the Commission they are not meant to be discrete or mutually exclusive and elements from the different options could be combined. The outlined policy options are:

- **Business as usual** - this option provides a reference point against which other options can be assessed. However, the Communication acknowledges that if no

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¹ Note: the Communication uses the term ‘invasive species’. However, it is noted that ‘invasive species’ are equivalent to ‘invasive alien species’ (IAS) as defined in the context of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

action is taken IAS will continue to become established in the EU with increased associated ecological, economic and social consequences and related costs.

- **Maximising the use of existing legal instruments together with voluntary measures** – according to this option the formal legal requirements related to IAS would remain unchanged, but there would be a conscious decision to proactively address IAS problems by fully implementing existing legislation and promoting voluntary measures.
- **Adapted existing legislation** – as option 2 above, but this option would include amendments to existing legislation on plant and animal health to cover a broader range of potentially invasive organisms. The list of ‘ecological threat species’, for which import and internal movement are prohibited under the Wildlife Trade Regulation, would be extended.
- **Comprehensive, dedicated EU legal instrument** - this option would involve setting up a comprehensive, dedicated legal framework for tackling IAS (taking into account existing legislation) with independent procedures for assessment and intervention.

The Communication concludes that a comprehensive EU legal instrument would be the most effective in terms of control of IAS. However, it is also recognised that this option would cause administrative costs for Member States and the Commission, as well as direct costs for economic operators that would need to be taken into account.

In general, the Commission’s ‘opening address’ in the Communication builds a solid case for why EU action to tackle IAS is needed. However, several stakeholders (including a number of Member States) are likely to be disappointed in the lack of detail and ambition in outlining the possible policy options.

It is hoped that the Communication will initiate wide political discussion within the EU (in particular within the Council and the Parliament) on the more detailed scope of the EU IAS Strategy. For example, several Member States have already expressed their support for the development of a comprehensive EU Strategy. Moreover, it is hoped that the Communication will trigger a clear commitment from all 27 Member States to tackle IAS and also stimulate more active participation of civil society actors (eg NGOs) in the debate. This wide support would play an important role in helping to develop and implement ambitious and successful EU action on IAS.

References

1. Commission Communication ‘Towards an EU Strategy on Invasive Species’ (COM/2008/789) and the accompanying impact assessment are available at: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/invasivealien/index_en.htm
2. Kettunen, M., Genovesi, P., Gollasch, S., Pagad, S., Starfinger, U., ten Brink, P., & Shine, C. 2008. Technical support to EU strategy on invasive species (IAS) - Assessment of the impacts of IAS in Europe and the EU (final module report for the European Commission). Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP), Brussels, Belgium. 43 pp. + Annexes. (final draft, work in progress)

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