



*EU Environmental Policy Briefing**

Commission Survey Reveals Support for EU Action on Invasive Alien Species

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In March 2008, the European Commission launched a web-based public consultation on Invasive Alien Species (IAS) to gather suggestions about how to address this issue most effectively at EU level. The survey ran from March until May, and consisted of sixteen questions included in five thematic sections: scale of IAS problems; options for prevention; early warning and rapid response; control; and conditions of success. The consultation attracted 880 replies, three quarters of them from individuals.

Invasive alien species are non-native species (plants, animals and micro-organisms) which represent one of the major current threats to biodiversity due to their significant impact on local flora and fauna, and damage to nature and the economy. To be able to achieve its target to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010, the European Commission is committed to addressing the threat on a European scale. As the EU currently lacks a coherent framework to tackle IAS, the results of the consultation shall be used to inform the development of EU policy in the field of IAS, the options for which shall be presented in a Communication from the Commission at the end of 2008.

Over 90 per cent of respondents to the survey agreed that there was an urgent need to review measures for prevention and control and to identify and put in place necessary measures to fill critical gaps. Furthermore, impacts on biodiversity at the genetic, species and ecosystems level, and damage to natural functions and resilience of ecosystems were considered to be very important when setting priorities for action at the EU level. Eighty per cent of respondents also agreed on the importance of preventing the introduction of invasive alien species into the wild. However, they perceived preventing the spread of IAS between Member States and the spread of species native in one part of the EU to other EU regions less important than the import of IAS from outside the EU continental territory.

An EU-wide early warning system would be welcomed by 90 per cent of respondents, and 86 per cent thought that Member States should be legally required to take control actions for the worst IAS. However, a majority of respondents considered it also important to avoid a significant increase in administrative burden for Member States

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regarding the development of an early-warning system and the exchange of information.

Most respondents (90 per cent) indicated that the lack of public awareness would constitute a barrier to launching stronger policies for prevention and management, and indicated that building public awareness of the problem is a necessary condition for success.

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