



**Think
2030**

Science-policy
solutions for a more
sustainable Europe

June 2024 - Policy brief

Making adaptation and resilience a priority in nature

**Adaptation &
Resilience**

As part of the Think2030 Conference (27 March 2024), the Institute for European Environmental Policy organised a session titled “Making adaptation and resilience a priority in nature restoration plans”. This policy brief summarises the key takeaways from this session. Moderated by Evelyn Underwood, Head of Programme, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IEEP), the session featured interventions by the following speakers: Adeline Rochet - Programme Manager, Corporate Leaders Group Europe, CLG - University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership; Barbora Chmelová – AMO, Member of Think Sustainable Europe network in Czech Republic – Ministry of Environment of Czech Republic; Elena Višnar Malinovská – Head of Unit, DG CLIMA, European Commission; Luc Bas - Director, Belgium Climate and Environment Risk Assessment Center; Sabien Leemans – Senior Biodiversity Policy Officer, WWF European Policy Office.

Making adaptation and resilience a priority in nature restoration plans

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Develop inspiring narratives for nature restoration and account for uncertainties in decision-making
- Promote multilevel governance and increase stakeholder participation to build trust and improve implementation
- Mobilise public and private funding for nature restoration and keep track of harmful subsidies
- Ensure collaborative and independent monitoring and reporting processes to address knowledge gaps and track implementation progress

Keeping nature restoration ambitions high amid an unfavourable political context

After the results of the EU Parliament elections at the beginning of June, the time has come for a realistic stocktake of the EU Green Deal at a decisive turning point in the political momentum. At the same time, the adoption of the EU Nature Restoration Law, after months of political deadlock, marks an ambitious step in EU's environmental policy for the decades to come.

The EU Council unveiled in April its strategic priorities for the next five years, which indicates a shift away from promoting a 'green Europe' as a key focus of the EU Agenda ([Consilium, 2024](#)). The composition of the new Parliament also shows a shift away from environmental priorities. This political shift creates concern for environmental experts and scientists, who have been warning about the critical importance of the 2020s decade for scaling up climate and biodiversity action. The recent EU Climate Risk Assessment (EEA, 2024) recognises Europe as the fastest-warming continent globally and underlines the EU's lack of preparedness to face increasingly critical climate risks. Regular polls also show that EU citizens consider environmental threats as key concerns (EC, 2024).

The Nature Restoration Law creates legally binding targets for nature conservation and restoration. Not only are natural ecosystems vital for the services they provide, but they are also our insurance against increasing climate-related risks. Nature restoration helps to reduce the impact and intensity of climate-related risks. It has the potential to reduce forest fire risk, increase resilience to extreme heat, regulate micro-climates in cities, and increase the resilience of soils to droughts and erosion, which is vital to guaranteeing food security.

Think2030 posed questions that will be key to the law's effective implementation:

- How will nature restoration be funded? What role can the private sector play?
- How can nature restoration planning and implementation tackle increasing uncertainty and increase resilience?
- How can we ensure a good integration of civil society and the private sector in the nature restoration planning process?

This briefing presents the key points raised by the experts and their recommendations for what is needed to put the EU on the path to adaptation and resilience.

The session participants discussed issues around the tension between the necessity for immediate actions, the long-term benefits of nature restoration and the failure of the political agenda to align accordingly. They highlighted that particular attention should be given to cooperation, funding, and monitoring.

Develop inspiring narratives for nature restoration and account for uncertainties in decision-making

We need to develop inspiring, realistic, and diverse narratives around nature restoration that will mobilise public support for ambitious action. There is also a need to collectively define and detail the parameters of living in a society promoting resilience and adaptation. This could lead to reconsidering the traditional narrative of short-term economic growth, aligned with GDP, which has been setting market and policy conditions favouring industrialised, extractive land uses and its associated negative impacts on biodiversity and climate. It was noted that nature-based solutions could be a powerful tool to promote the notion that nature restoration can achieve multiple benefits by providing a response to societal challenges whilst increasing nature's value.

The Corporate Leaders Group Europe, representing leading businesses, supports the nature restoration law because they see that the transition towards a nature-positive economy will bring both economic resilience and new commercial opportunities.

WWF stresses the significance of nature restoration for societal well-being and warns against inaction given the impact of climate change on farmers and communities. A focus on showcasing success stories of nature restoration would help.

The Director of the Climate and Environment Risk Assessment Center in Belgium highlighted the urgency of connecting climate risk assessments with actionable measures and urged increased investment in climate protection and nature-based solutions.

Restoring natural ecosystems involves a degree of uncertainty, as noted during the session. This uncertainty is partly to do with the influence climate change is having on our ecosystems and ecological processes, which means that the success of actions cannot be completely predicted, and partly to do with the different socio-economic pathways that can be taken. Accounting for uncertainties in decision-making should prevent current excuses for inaction when facing environmental challenges.

Promote multilevel governance and increase stakeholder participation to build trust and improve implementation

Promoting multi-level governance and facilitating stakeholder cooperation across sectors will be key to building trust and achieving the EU nature restoration targets. The strengthening of participation and the inclusion of land and water managers in the decision-making process will be key to ensuring the commitment needed to achieving targets.

Actors of the transition, starting with land and water managers, need to be actively involved in identifying the benefits and the economic costs of nature restoration activities. Incentive mechanisms and financial compensation for lost economic opportunities are needed.

Citizens' and civil society's involvement in decision-making processes and ensuring transparency were also raised as essential. Citizens provide local knowledge needed for the successful implementation of restoration measures and can help hold policymakers accountable. Existing structures of collaboration should be promoted, and tools for public participation should be more regularly mobilised: public consultations, bottom-up and innovative approaches, etc. The Czech environment ministry has anticipated the nature restoration legislation and set up working groups that cross government departments and involve civil society, businesses, and scientists in the restoration planning.

As raised during the Think2030 session, the private sector needs to be actively involved in nature restoration. The use of private-public instruments can be an efficient way to do so, as they can drive innovation and boost positive benefits for the community.

Promoting collaborative governance approaches requires effective science-policy communication. The session unveiled several issues: How can we better deal with scientific denial? How can we better integrate and align scientific evidence into policymaking? Scientific education, as well as awareness-raising about environmental issues, should be prioritised. Likewise, scientific collaboration between Member States, experts, and civil society should be promoted to ensure the effective collection of evidence and the development of monitoring activities.

Collaborative governance should help better integrate biodiversity and climate policies across the policy agenda. Many policies, such as the CAP or the Flood Directive, harness the potential to leverage nature restoration measures and funding if properly integrated and objectives aligned. In parallel, it is also important to recognise and address the potential conflicts between objectives under different policies, such as the roll out of renewable energies and increasing bioenergy demand. Spatial planning and land use planning are critical tools both for climate adaptation and for nature

restoration. The discussion raised also the challenge faced by countries such as Slovakia of engaging many private landowners with highly fragmented land uses and in some cases legal uncertainties about who actually controls and owns land.

Dedicated public funding and leveraging private funding

Finding sufficient funding and leveraging opportunities for the private sector to invest will also be a key to success. Member States will need to state in their national restoration plans how they will mobilise funding for nature restoration across public and private sources. A speaker highlighted that this will need quick action to integrate funding targets and mechanisms into broader plans.

The perceived financial burden of nature restoration on farmers and foresters is one of the main points made by the opponents of the law. Whilst achieving the EU nature restoration goals and increasing climate resilience will need a big increase in investments and economic support for those who are doing it, the economic costs of inaction in the face of increasing climate hazards are rarely accounted for.

Panellists recalled findings from the latest EU Climate Risk Assessment, which underlines some of the economic implications of inaction. In a scenario of 2°C warming, economic damage from droughts could reach €12.2 billion per year in the EU, and €17.2 billion per year at 3°C warming. In terms of coastal flooding, the annual expected damage in EU Member States and Norway has been projected to increase from €1 billion in 2020 to €1 trillion by 2100 under a high-emissions scenario. Severe impairments in terms of ecosystem functioning and its associated services (including pollination services, recreational and health value of ecosystems, and pollution control) are also projected in business-as-usual climate scenarios.

There is a need for a better assessment of the cost of inaction and the local impacts of maladaptation. Having a good understanding of the financial risks of failing to increase the climate resilience of our ecosystems makes the investment case clear in favour of nature restoration projects, and highlights that these projects are profitable in the long term.

Biodiversity and climate issues are critically underfunded in the EU and worsened by the impacts of environmentally harmful subsidies. The national nature restoration plans will need to identify subsidies that negatively affect the achievement of the targets. According to a recent report from WWF, EU Member States channel between €34 and €48 billion of European subsidies annually into activities that harm nature (WWF EU, 2024). The next EU Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) needs to upscale funding for climate and biodiversity and contain policy instruments to eliminate environmentally harmful subsidies, as well as better tracking of the funding

allocations to climate and biodiversity objectives. Existing funds, for example from the CAP or the CFP, could be better targeted to funding nature restoration.

There is a need to increase the capacity of regional and local administrations to mobilise EU funding for nature restoration, as they are often unaware of the funding opportunities available to them. They also need incentives and instruments to scale up and mainstream best practices – to green their public procurements, to leverage private finance flows, and to realise the social and economic benefits from nature restoration.

The session highlighted that private funding needs to be leveraged via economic incentives, the derisking of investments for nature, and potential sanctions for activities adversely impacting nature. From that perspective, the benefits of nature restoration should be more strongly highlighted, as well as its opportunities for job creation (CISL, 2023).

Monitoring and reporting

Monitoring and reporting were highlighted during the session as an essential part of successful nature restoration planning. For their national restoration planning, Member States will have to carry out preparatory monitoring and research to identify restoration and habitat recreation priorities. Member States should address knowledge gaps and collaborate with research institutions and civil society to improve monitoring and data collection.

The scientific literature already contains extensive evidence supporting the necessity of undertaking nature restoration measures. The need for more data and evidence should not be used as an argument to justify political inaction. Instead, monitoring and evaluation should be key tools to solve existing knowledge gaps, evaluate the implementation process of restoration measures and learn from potential failure.

The session highlighted the lack of evidence supporting the cost-effectiveness of nature restoration measures, which is one of the main barriers preventing the private and financial sectors from getting involved. Approaches for valuing the costs and benefits of nature restoration (such as natural capital accounting) should be further developed.

References

Consilium (2024). EU strategic agenda 2024–2029

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/strategic-agenda-2024-2029/>

CISL (2023) *From Risk to Resilience: The Business Imperative of Nature Restoration*.

University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL), Cambridge, UK.

https://www.corporateleadersgroup.com/files/cisl_from_risk_to_resilience_report_2023_v2.pdf

EC (2024) *Special Eurobarometer 550: Attitudes of Europeans towards the Environment*

European Commission <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3173>

EEA (2024) *European climate risk assessment*. EEA Report No 1/2024, European

Environment Agency, Denmark. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/european-climate-risk-assessment>

WWF EU (2024) *Can your money do better? Redirecting harmful subsidies to foster nature and climate resilience*. WWF European Policy Office, Brussels, Belgium.

https://wwfeu.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wwf---harmful-subsidies-report_full-report.pdf



Think 2030

Science-policy
solutions for a more
sustainable Europe

About Think2030

Launched by IEEP and its partners in 2018, Think2030 is an evidence-based, non-partisan platform of leading policy experts from European think tanks, civil society, the private sector and local authorities.

By focusing on producing relevant, timely and concrete policy recommendations, Think2030's key objective is to identify science-policy solutions for a more sustainable Europe.

think2030.eu

#Think2030

For more information on this paper please contact:

Laure-Lou Tremblay, Policy Analyst, IEEP
ltremblay@ieep.eu

Evelyn Underwood, Head of Biodiversity Programme, IEEP
eunderwood@ieep.eu



This work has been produced with the financial support of the LIFE Programme of the European Union. The paper reflects only the views of its authors and not the donors.