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An ambitious vision for European wildlife: suggestions to the draft Vision and Strategic Plan for the Bern Convention for the period to 2030

On 14 May 2021, [Friends of the Earth Europe](#) (FOEE) and [CEE Bankwatch Network](#) submitted joint suggestions to the draft Vision and Strategic Plan for the Bern Convention for the period to 2030. Both organisations participate in the [Working Group](#) set up by the 40th Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats.

The convention came into force in 1982 and led to the creation in 1998 of the [Emerald network](#) of Areas of Special Conservation Interest (ASCIs) throughout the territory of the parties to the convention. Emerald operates alongside the European Union's [Natura 2000](#) programme.

The case-file system of the convention deals with many projects impacting protected habitats and species, including hydropower plants in [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), [Georgia](#) and [Ukraine](#); the Amulsar gold mine in [Armenia](#); and Struma Motorway in [Bulgaria](#).

The Bern Convention Vision we propose:

By 2030, wild flora, fauna and habitats throughout the territory of the Convention's contracting parties, in Europe and beyond, attain a favourable conservation status as a contribution to wider Council of Europe objectives for people and the environment, and to globally-agreed targets for biodiversity and sustainable development.

Summary of our main remarks and suggestions:

Vision:

- Habitats are protected in their own right, not just as a home for species, so we suggest deleting 'their' before habitats.
- The Bern Convention is valid not only in Europe, but in some countries in other continents too: Africa, parts of Latin America.
- Where possible, we suggest avoiding relative words such as 'improving' because the Bern Convention does not have a good baseline.

- We suggest clear ambition levels – by 2030, all species and habitats that now have favourable conservation status (FCS) will maintain it and all others either reach FCS (Option 1, which we prefer) or at least improve their status (Option 2).

Other points:

- Generally, as the draft also states, SMART (specific, measureable, achievable, realistic and timely) targets would be good. This does not always require a numerical value but certainly clear terms. We have made a few suggestions in that direction.
- While restoration is an important issue, maintaining existing valuable biodiversity must take precedence over creating new habitats. Once a species is extinct, it cannot be recreated, and many habitats such as old-growth forests or peatlands either take centuries to be restored, or cannot be restored under current conditions. It is therefore important to mention the conservation of existing habitats and species separately.
- Nature-based solutions is a new term for which there is no agreed definition and we propose more appropriate language. Problems should be avoided where they occur in the first place: for example, climate change is due to excessive output of fossil fuels, so the use of fossil fuel needs to be phased out. We should not create the false idea that it is possible to destroy nature in one place and ‘rebuild’ it in another.
- We propose adding a paragraph on the role of stakeholders, which offer a big contribution to the functioning of the Convention, i.e. through participation at the Standing Committee, in working groups and through the case-file system.
- A target to finalise the Emerald network needs to be included, or at least a paragraph in line with the last Standing Committee report: *‘Contracting Parties that are in phase II should finalise that phase and reach target 2 and 3 of the strategic workplan by 2025, and finalise phase III (target 4) by 2030, and that Parties that have not yet started any phase fulfil phase II of the strategic workplan by 2030 at the latest’*. Note that the Standing Committee decided 11 years ago that the network should be finalised by 2020, but none of the countries actually achieved this.

In the following document, the original draft is visible along with FOEE and Bankwatch’s proposed changes.



CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Vision and Strategic Plan for the Bern Convention for the period to 2030

DRAFT VISION and PRELIMINARY OUTLINE OF STRATEGIC PLAN

For consideration by the Working Group (*via* on-line consultation)

April 2021

Explanatory note:

At its first meeting on 23 March 2021, the Working Group on a Vision and Strategic Plan for the Bern Convention agreed to distinguish the treatment of these two elements. The Group proposed the development of a draft Vision as the first stage. This could be accompanied by a suggested outline of the Strategic Plan, but full development of the latter would occur subsequently, once there was reasonable agreement about the Vision.

The present document accordingly presents a suggested text for the “Vision” component, and an outline of the approach that could be taken to the remainder of the Strategic Plan. It takes into account the background material and options presented in the Scoping Document for the 23 March meeting (<https://rm.coe.int/scoping-document-for-the-vision-working-group/1680a1dd38>) and the deliberations of the Working Group as summarised in the report of that first meeting (<https://rm.coe.int/report-of-the-1st-meeting-of-the-wg-vision-23-march-2021/1680a1f664>).

Vision

Biodiversity is in serious decline worldwide, affecting the lives of billions of people and the ability of the planet to sustain itself. The challenges this poses are compounded - as never before - by other negative trends in climate, disease and geopolitical turbulence. There is an urgent need for an ambitious step-change in humanity's response to this.

Cause for hope and optimism can be found in progressive forms of international cooperation, public support, and smart policies backed by sound science. For more than 40 years the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) has excelled at these; offering an achievable agenda for Europe and a model for the wider world.

The Convention's vision for the next decade is clear and transformative. The Parties seek:

*By 2030, Wild flora, fauna and ~~their~~ habitats throughout the territory of the Convention's contracting parties, in Europe and beyond.
1) attain a favourable conservation status (Option 1)
2) have attained ~~attaining or recovering towards~~ a favourable or improved conservation status¹, (Option 2)
as a contribution to wider Council of Europe objectives for people and the environment, and to globally-agreed targets for biodiversity and sustainable development.*

Commented [FW1]: Not only habitats of species, but also those relevant for the megalith network

► The vision for Europe's wildlife

- (i) The Bern Convention's ~~original~~ aims ~~remain paramount, as envisaged~~ envisaged (in Articles 1 and 2), to achieve a Europe region in which wild fauna and flora and their habitats are conserved, wildlife populations are maintained or adapted to levels that correspond to ecological, cultural and other requirements, and endangered and vulnerable species receive special attention; all underpinned by good cooperation between States.
- (ii) Based on Article 2 of the Convention, the Parties now aspire more explicitly to halt and reverse the loss and degradation of Europe's wildlife and habitats. The period to 2030 will be marked by greater strong and dedicated efforts towards conservation, restoration and recovery, forming a major pan-European contribution to (among others) the UN Decade on ecosystem restoration.
- (iii) Similarly, and in more varied ways, the Bern Convention's vision for European wildlife forms a key contribution to other intergovernmental visions for conservation and recovery of the natural world, defined for example innotably to Goal A and targets 1-7 of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, to goals 14 and 15 of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to the nature conservation targets of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.
- (iv) By 2030 Europe's ~~most important~~ wildlife sites will be well-documented, well maintained and managed, well protected against threats, linked in a coherent network

Commented [FW2]: This is a defensive approach: Look, we may be a bit outdated but we are still here. I would rather state the obvious and not refer to "original" aims which "remain paramount".

Commented [FW3]: Need wording to include non-European contracting parties

Commented [FW4]: unclear, diffuse, to what baseline?

Commented [FW5]: same issue

Commented [FW6]: - While restoration is an important issue, maintaining existing valuable biodiversity must have precedence over creating new habitats. Once a species is extinct, it cannot be recreated, and many habitats such as old-growth forests or peatlands either take centuries to be restored, or cannot be restored under current conditions. It is therefore important to mention the conservation of existing habitats and species separately. And there still is a lot to be done for conservation!

Commented [FW7]: The scope of the Bern Convention is more limited so it seems appropriate to point out the relevant parts of the CBD and the Agenda 2030 for more clarity.

Commented [FW8]: not just the most important ones

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¹¹ A) towards a 2021 baseline b) FCS and status levels as defined in EU Habitats directive and Art. 17 reporting

that meets the needs of the species and habitats for which they are identified (throughout their relevant ranges of distribution), restored or rehabilitated where necessary, enhanced where possible, and accessible to the public where appropriate.

- (v) The Convention's vision is for all of these aims to be achieved through a "whole of government" (i.e. cross-sectoral) approach, in productive partnership with civil society, the scientific community and the private sector.

► The vision for the Bern Convention's unique role

- (vi) The Bern Convention will remain the pre-eminent intergovernmental instrument for pan-European cooperation on the conservation of biodiversity. It will give sound guidance where applicable also on nature-based solutions of relevance mainstreaming biodiversity into other policy sectors.

- (vii) The Convention will provide durable sustainability mechanisms that facilitate successful results at national level from practical actions to protect and restore sites, species and habitats, achieving the Convention's objectives defined not only in the Convention itself but also and contributing to those of in other relevant international strategies and agreements.

- (viii) Bern Convention mechanisms including Action Plans, the Emerald Network, Case Files, On the Spot Appraisals and the European Diploma will be ~~more~~ widely known, ~~more~~ strongly supported and used with maximum effectiveness as practical ways of supporting the objectives referred to above. Visibility outreach and educational activities will be used where appropriate to enhance these objectives.

- (ix) In tandem with growing-increased support in the Council of Europe for environmental issues in general, the Bern Convention will demonstrate more prominently the interlinkages afforded uniquely in the Council of Europe context between conservation of nature and other measures relating to human rights, democracy, landscape, cultural heritage and major hazards. Each of these in different ways will be underpinned by a thriving natural environment, benefiting people's livelihoods, food and water security, community resilience, well-being and quality of life.

- (x) The Bern Convention will exemplify best practices of working in synergy and partnership with other relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements and related international processes, in support of efficiently harmonised actions at national level.

- (xi) Assisted by Groups of Experts and other collaborations, all standards, guidelines and advice developed within the framework of the Convention will be based on the best available scientific and technical knowledge. They will also be generated in ways that are inclusive, participatory and democratically accountable.

- (xii) Confidence and support for the unique strengths of the Bern Convention among its Contracting Parties and other supporters will be high, resulting in sufficient provision of funding, support-in-kind and other resources to ensure that this Vision is fully realised.

Commented [FW9]: The pre-2010 strategy of the CBD was like that, talking about the role of the Convention in relation to other conventions. Not very useful - the Convention is a tool to achieve biodiversity outcomes, not an end in itself. But we do not object.

Commented [FW10]: -Nature-based solution is a new term for which there is no agreed definition yet. By concept, it turns Nature into a "solution", a tool to remedy problems that have been caused elsewhere. But these problems should be avoided where they occur in the first place: for example, climate change is due to excessive output of fossil fuels, so the use of fossil fuel needs to be phased out. The concept creates the false idea that the impression that is possible to destroy nature in one place and "rebuild" it in another.

Commented [FW11]: We suggest to differentiate: first the convention, then also a contribution to others - but the former has priority

Commented [FW12]: Our perception is that environment issues are getting less attention at the CoE. Maybe delet thi

(xiii) Stakeholder engagement is vital to address important issues and for the functioning of the Convention. The Convention will further strengthen their role in developing and implementing the convention, i.a. through participation at the Standing Committee, in working groups and through the case-file system.

Commented [FW13]: importance of cs for functioning

Note:

The remainder of the text that follows below is at this stage not a draft, but merely an outline of the approach being suggested for development of the Strategic Plan which is proposed eventually to accompany the Vision.

Headline action priorities for the period to 2030

In addition to the high-level Vision and the fuller Strategic Plan that follows, *[it is proposed that]* the Parties *[will]* have identified a limited number of objectives that summarise the main action priorities for the period to 2030. These will be used to guide work programming and associated progress reviews, supported by the specific targets, activities and indicators defined in the Plan.

The *[proposed]* “headline” priorities are as follows (note: the sequence in which these are listed does not necessarily represent an order of priority within the list):

1. Threatened and vulnerable species are set on a path to recovery (following specific defined priorities for recovery and restoration).
2. The extent and quality of the Emerald Network is sufficient to meet the habitat and species protection objectives defined for it from time to time, and the requisite management and monitoring systems are operating effectively.
3. Nature-based solutions Biodiversity and Ecosystems are widely implemented maintained and restored, in response to the need to mitigate the causes of climate change and adapt to its effects.
4. The Case File and On the Spot Appraisal mechanisms are implemented promptly and efficiently when they are merited, with sufficient capacity to deal appropriately with all the complaints submitted to the Convention.
5. Specific recommendations arising from individual Case Files are followed up and acted upon; and cases are resolved and closed within a reasonable timeframe.
6. The Convention is working in strong and productive synergy with other policy agendas of the Council of Europe.
7. The Convention is working in strong and productive synergy with EU and other and relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements and related international processes and legislation.
8. The Convention demonstrates a model example of inclusive, participatory approaches involving multiple stakeholders, including civil society.
9. Interim progress towards objectives and the eventual resulting outcomes are monitored, reported, assessed, and lessons arising are fed into future planning. A regular monitoring system of biodiversity is fully operational to fulfil the reporting obligations including on progress in the Emerald work, coordinated/aligned with the reporting processes of the EU Art 12 and Art 17 Habitats Directive. A midterm review is undertaken and presented to the Standing Committee in 2025.
10. Increased information activities lead to a widespread awareness of the Bern Convention and its role among the general public.
11. The resources for the Convention are commensurate with its tasks, and that it is operating on a sound footing in terms of resources and capacity.
12. Additional interested States are invited to accede to the Convention.

Commented [FW14]: see above - we would prefer to commit on a certain status, preferably favourable conservation status.

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Commented [FW15]: unclear term, either delete or include the target proposed at the Standing Committee: "that Contracting Parties that are in phase II should finalise that phase and reach target 2 and 3 of the strategic workplan by 2025, and finalise phase III (target 4) by 2030. Further, it was suggested that Parties that have not yet started any phase fulfil phase II of the strategic workplan by 2030 at the latest."

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Commented [FW16]: we have issues with the term "Nature based solution, see above"

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Commented [FW17]: unclear

Commented [FW18]: Can be an issue!

Commented [FW19]: Due to the fact that most of the contracting parties are member of the EU, and that the EU has clear legislation on this, we suggest to mention the EU explicitly

Commented [FW20]: not sure if this is redundant

Commented [FW21]: such as Natura 2000

Commented [FW22]: Midterm review

Commented [FW23]: We feel that there is a need to point out that the convention not only need a sound and continuous financing basis, but that this must also be enough for it to do what it needs to do to achieve its purpose and objectives.

Commented [FW24]: clarification needed, additional accessions encouraged

A Strategic Plan

The following is a provisional outline of the Strategic Plan that is proposed to accompany the Vision for the period to 2030. The section headings follow those suggested in the initial Scoping Document of March 2021, and some further detail on each of them can be found in that document – see <https://rm.coe.int/scoping-document-for-the-vision-working-group/1680a1dd38>.

A. About the Bern Convention

- Some brief factual information about the Convention, including the distinctive niche it occupies, the specific added value it contributes, and its situation in relation to the wider role of the Council of Europe and other international agendas.

B. Purpose of the Strategic Plan

- A statement of the purpose of the Plan, and (in conjunction with the Vision) how it is expected to be used. Elements of this might include:
 - Defining (though the Vision) a clear “high level” ambition for what the Parties wish the Convention to achieve;
 - Defining a direction of travel, and a “pathway of change”;
 - Targets, milestones and an implementation calendar to finalize the Emerald network, as defined in document xxx (reference to relevant decisions)
 - Providing a guiding framework for other programmes and activities;
 - Specifying the Convention’s contribution to wider agendas, and providing a formal basis for synergies;
 - Increasing awareness and support for what the Convention offers;
 - Establishing a robust set of measurable targets and indicators, and a framework for monitoring these.

Commented [FW25]: preferably, we would aim for a state to be achieved rather than a direction. A concerted pathway of change (with measures, timelines etc.) should be in addition to this.

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C. Context

- By reference to recent assessment reports, this section would include statements describing global trends in biodiversity and the state of crisis to which the Vision and Plan are aiming to respond. It would emphasise the need for urgent and intensified action, and the costs to society of inaction. It would summarise the nature of the opportunities provided through the special attributes and regional specifics of the Bern Convention as described in section A. “Internal” lessons from experience, and priorities for development of the Convention itself are also part of this context.

Commented [FW26]: The uniqueness of the Convention also comes from the fact that for many countries outside the EU it is the most important international framework for Nature Conservation. For some countries, such as Switzerland or Ukraine, it is the relevant international tool for saving species and habitats.

D. The pathway for change

- The conceptual basis for expecting the Plan to make a difference. The “causal pathway”, “chain of causation” or “theory of change” is a description of the principles and assumptions concerning the ways in which actions specified in the Plan are expected to lead to a shift from the “baseline condition” (status in 2021) to the desired outcomes (status in 2030).

Commented [FW27]: do we have that?

Commented [FW28]: in absolute and not relative terms

E. Goals and targets

- Probably the main substantive section of the Plan. Targets to be kept to a manageable limited number, but to cover all the most important issues. To seek some harmonisation with related frameworks such as the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and the EU Biodiversity Strategy. Achievement of the targets should add up to achievement of the goals, which in turn should achieve the Vision. Intermediate milestones might also be defined. Distinction between “means” and “ends” to be borne in mind, and targets should as far as possible be “SMART” (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound).

This should definitely contain one or several targets on the Emerald network, - we propose “Contracting Parties that are in phase II should finalise that phase and reach target 2 and 3 of the strategic workplan by 2025, and finalise phase III (target 4) by 2030. Further, it was suggested that Parties that have not yet started any phase fulfil phase II of the strategic workplan by 2030 at the latest.” as proposed by NGOs, and supported by EU at the last committee meeting.
We also suggest to mirror the 2030 vision and favourable conservation status.

F. Monitoring and evaluation

- Essential specification of the regime for reviewing progress and assessing whether the Plan is achieving what it sets out to do. A framework for monitoring and evaluation of all the objectives (goals, milestones, targets) defined in the Plan. To include indicators, metrics, means of verification, and any additional information on processes for reporting and review. Need to clarify responsibilities (also in terms of finance).

G. Ownership and responsibilities for implementation

- Description of the various levels at which the Plan will operate; expected responsibilities of Contracting Parties and the roles of others, including: Financial responsibilities.

H. Relationship to action plans and other instruments for implementation

- To explain how the Plan connects to other topic-based strategies and plans developed under the Convention, and how these all harmonise together.

Commented [FW29]: Yes, but keep it simple.

I. Promoting awareness and use of the Plan

- Summary of associated communications and outreach efforts needed to bring the Plan to the attention of target audiences and users. Need to be clearer on who are the target audiences than before, so outreach is more effective.

Commented [FW30]: who are these target audiences? Need more clarity, should be defined.

J. Capacity and resources

- Measures for mobilising resources to implement the Plan; developing new or strengthened capacity where needed (including by cooperative partnerships); and the generation, management and sharing of knowledge and information.

Commented [FW31]: including monitoring and example for budget

[END]