

a good mix for biodiversity research

“As biodiversity is gradually gaining recognition as an important field of research, it is crucial that EU countries join their efforts to improve coherence of their programmes at the European scale”

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The preservation of species is not just an ethical or cultural imperative – biodiversity sustains life on earth.

Numerous biodiversity research programmes exist, but the majority of funding is at the national level, linked to the priorities of each country. Funding agencies from 15 EU countries have established BiodivERsA to develop coordination of biodiversity research programmes in Europe. They will look at their funding and management mechanisms and policies in an attempt to agree common strategies, common systems and best practice. Co-operation between the partners will culminate in a common research call. This experience will pave the way for a formalised structure through which biodiversity research funding can be coordinated from a European perspective.

Life as we know it is under threat. It may sound like media hype, but studies show that the accelerating rate of species extinction (over 15 000 species are now at risk) could have a significant impact on our way of life. Each extinction changes the capacity of natural and managed ecosystems to deliver ‘goods and services’, everything from food and fibre to resisting climate change. In other words, biodiversity goes far beyond the preservation of species – it sustains all life on earth, including ours.

As biodiversity creeps up policy agendas, many countries now run national research programmes in this field. In addition, there are several groups and organisations (e.g. the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy) that support and promote research at an international level.

However, it is widely accepted that biodiversity research, its funding and its support infrastructures are largely uncoordinated and fragmented between funding bodies. Numerous conferences have called for greater coordination in this field.

A rich variety

BiodivERsA has therefore been set up to establish durable co-operation between the national funding agencies. Together, its 18 founding partners allocate more than €110 million annually for a variety of projects and programmes. The challenge of BiodivERsA is to coordinate policies and practice between the network members and maximise overall output across national boundaries.

To achieve this goal, the BiodivERsA ERA-NET will follow a step-wise plan over a period of four years to open up and integrate Member State biodiversity research programmes. The consortium has already begun to compile a compendium of planned and existing programmes in FP6 countries. The partners will also collect data on the funding of biodiversity projects in developing countries. This information will form the core of a searchable database that will provide funding organisations all over Europe with comprehensive information on research taking place and the funding mechanisms behind it.

This initial exchange will help to develop trust between the BiodivERsA partners who will then begin to share more detailed information on the ‘inner workings’ of their programmes. The idea is to compare, through workshops and on-line consultations, the methods used to manage biodiversity research in each country, and in developing countries, and to identify standards and best practice that could be applied across organisations. Staff



Coordination Action BiodivERsA



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Full title:

Biodiversity Research ERA-NET

Research field:

Biodiversity

Co-ordinator:

France: Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique/Institut Français de la Biodiversité

Partners:

- Austria: Fonds zur Förderung der Wissenschaftlichen Forschung
- Belgium: Federal Public Planning Service
- Estonia: Estonian Science Foundation
- France: Ministère de L'Ecologie et du Développement Durable
- Germany: Der Projektträger im Deutschen Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt
- Hungary: Ministry of Environment and Water
- Ireland: Environmental Protection Agency
- Italy: Ministero della Istruzione, Università e Ricerca
- The Netherlands: Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research
- Norway: The Research Council of Norway
- France: European Science Foundation
- Portugal: Foundation of Science and Technology
- Spain: Ministry of Education and Science
- Sweden: Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning
- Sweden: Swedish Research Council
- Sweden: Swedish Environmental Protection Agency
- United Kingdom: The Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
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“As we go along, this will bring new ideas and skills to each of us, and thus improve the way biodiversity research programmes are managed”

exchanges and training workshops will help organisations to implement new management methods.

This process will also reveal technical, legal or administrative barriers that the partners may have to overcome to attain closer integration of research programmes. Other established ERA-NETs will be contacted for advice on how such barriers have already been addressed.

Combined strength

With the foundations laid, BiodivERsA will then gear up for concrete collaboration in the form of joint activities and research calls. Having identified topics of mutual interest and synergies between programmes, the consortium will draw up plans for the joint opening up of their research, and will issue at least one common call between network members. The consortium will also publish, in close collaboration with selected developing countries, a joint call in at least one area of biodiversity research in developing countries.

It is expected that this first collaborative programme will be just the beginning of long-term co-operation. Through a series of workshops and conferences, the BiodivERsA partners will develop a joint strategy and a work plan for sustained transnational co-operation, suggesting options for a formalised structure with pooled funding, including the application of Article 169.

The gradual alignment of European biodiversity research through BiodivERsA will help to address some of the concerns expressed in the 2001 Gothenburg Council Statement, the 2002 WSSD conclusions, and the European Biodiversity Strategy, among others. Bringing together all the relevant players in Europe will enhance existing research, and ensure that future efforts are coherently planned and efficiently performed for the greater benefit of ecological stability – and sustainable human development – in Europe and beyond.