be recognised and strengthened. The EU should actively support ecosystem-based approaches including the Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) process, contributing to an end to global deforestation.

6. Protecting global biodiversity
The EU should promote improvements in international governance on biodiversity, bringing together nature conservation and poverty reduction efforts. We need to understand the impact of EU consumption patterns and take steps to reduce it. Sustainable fisheries should be actively promoted and biodiversity concerns included in trade and investment agreements. By 2010, Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) should conclude a global agreement on equitable access to and equitable sharing of benefits from the use of genetic resources.

7. Integrating biodiversity into other policy areas
EU policies relating to agriculture, fisheries, regional development, transport, energy, trade and development can have significant impacts on European and global biodiversity. Progress has been made in taking account of biodiversity concerns in many of these areas – but much remains to be done, and the impact of these policies needs to be addressed in a systematic manner. Sustainable consumption and production policies should be extended to cover natural resources. Market measures, such as green procurement, ought to be developed to make it profitable for business to invest in nature conservation.

8. Funding
Many EU and national funds have the potential to support biodiversity protection. However, in practice, the financial resources allocated remain inadequate compared to needs. If the current system is not working, new funding mechanisms have to be developed. Private sector funding should also be mobilised. Subsidies which damage biodiversity should be identified and phased out.

The Message from Athens

On 27-28 April 2009, in Athens, Greece, the European Commission hosted an international high-level conference on biodiversity. Its aim was to identify the key policy priorities to start the debate on future (post-2010) biodiversity policy.

Taking part were leading scientists, politicians, economists and academics, as well as representatives from European Union Member States, civil society and business. Together, they provided the Message from Athens: an eight-point plan for future action to confront the ongoing global biodiversity crisis.

The full text of the message and more information on the Conference are available at:
**Why the Athens Conference?**

The EU has been active in conserving Europe’s natural heritage for 30 years: the first wildlife legislation, the Birds Directive, came into force in 1979. In 2001, Member States set 2010 as the target date for halting biodiversity loss in Europe, and in 2004, a landmark conference in the Republic of Ireland sent out the **Message from Malahide**, outlining key policies and objectives. In 2006 the European Commission adopted the EU Biodiversity Action Plan, a detailed work plan including the actions needed to be carried out to achieve the 2010 biodiversity target.

Five years on, Athens is equally important a milestone as Malahide. Scientific indicators show that the 2010 target will not be met, even though substantial progress has been made – most notably with the development of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas, now covering 17% of EU territory. The 2008 Biodiversity Action Plan mid-term report found that the speed and scale of biodiversity loss mean that much tougher action is needed – and urgently.

Human society derives massive, life-sustaining benefits from ecosystem goods and services, including raw materials, purification of air and water, and mitigation of climate change. However, their true value is not reflected in conventional economic management and, until this basic failing is addressed, biodiversity will continue to suffer. The Message from Athens sets out the **eight key priorities** for the future, summarised as follows:

1. **A vision of why biodiversity matters**
   Healthy ecosystems underpin our entire economic, social and cultural well-being – and we need to be more aware of this. The message that “biodiversity matters” has to be put across more forcefully, and this means stepping up communication activities, as well as making the explicit link between conserving biodiversity and tackling climate change. The EU has to agree a new biodiversity target for 2010 onwards, accompanied by sectoral sub-targets.

2. **A better understanding of where we are and what we need to do**
   Accurate information on current trends in biodiversity is crucial. Better and clearer indicators are needed, together with the development of a biodiversity baseline from which to measure progress. The Nobel Prize-winning UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) offers inspiration for improving the link between science and policy-making. Biodiversity research should be a higher priority.

3. **A fully functioning network of protected areas**
   The next step for the Natura 2000 network is to put effective management structures into place and make adequate funding available. The entire network should be completed by 2010 (land-based areas), and 2012 (marine areas). More work is needed to improve the sites’ connectivity, so that wildlife can move between them, and to develop similar networks in the EU’s overseas territories. The EU Birds and Habitats Directives have to be implemented and enforced more effectively, unnecessary administrative burdens removed, and examples of best practice identified and publicised.

4. **Biodiversity outside protected areas**
   Protected areas are essential – but they do not exist in isolation from the rest of the landscape. Biodiversity policy should aim to conserve the resilience and vitality of entire ecosystems. Restoration of degraded land ought to be used as a stimulus for local economic development and creation of jobs. And specific EU-wide action is needed to address the threat posed by invasive species and to protect Europe’s soils.

5. **Climate Change**
   Just as we cannot halt biodiversity loss without addressing climate change, it is equally impossible to tackle climate change without arresting biodiversity loss. International climate negotiations need to take full account of this link. The EU’s climate change policies need to address the wider ecosystem challenge, and the contribution of EU biodiversity policies to climate change mitigation and adaptation should

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“Biodiversity is life – beautiful, precious and fragile. But it is also the basis of our economic and social well-being. This is not widely enough recognised and valued. As a result it is in serious decline. The message from Athens underlines that biodiversity needs to become a universal political priority.”

Stavros Dimas, EU Environment Commissioner