



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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**NOTE**

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from : General Secretariat  
to : Delegations  
Subject : European Conference on Invasive Alien Species (Madrid, 15-16 January 2008)

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Delegations will find annexed information from the Presidency on the above subject, which will be dealt with under "other business" at the meeting of the Council (Environment) on 3 March 2008.

## EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES

Invasive alien species (IAS) are aggressive newcomers to local ecosystems and are posing a serious threat to biodiversity. They have significant adverse effects on biodiversity, and consequently, affect ecosystem services and human well-being.

The EU's political commitment to achieving the global target of significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010, and also to halting the rate of biodiversity loss within the EU by 2010, oblige us to effectively combat Invasive Alien Species.

The need to address the issue of IAS at EU level is highlighted by several regional and global developments:

- With the enlargement of the Schengen border-free zone, the area without border control or quarantine measures has been broadened;
- New demands on the market facilitate the intentional introduction of alien species for particular uses, which consequently increases the threat of their spread in nature;
- Due to climate change, a rapid alteration of environmental conditions is expected, and this will also contribute to the spread and establishment of IAS which will also overburden migratory pathways with IAS.

The issue of invasive alien species has a cross-sectoral dimension and to be effectively addressed, active participation of all relevant stakeholders is needed.

The European Conference on Invasive Alien Species that took place in Madrid on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> January 2008 has given representatives of the competent authorities of the Member States of the European Union, interested public and private organisations and institutions, independent experts and non-governmental organisations an opportunity to meet and exchange knowledge. The Conference was organized by the Biodiversity Foundation of the Spanish Ministry of the Environment, jointly with the European Commission under the Slovenian EU Presidency.

Objectives of the Madrid Conference were to come up with ideas and recommendations so as to move forward the policy on invasive alien species, at European and national levels, taking into account the overarching goal of halting biodiversity loss by 2010, and to raise the awareness on the threat that IAS pose to biodiversity.

Work at the Conference was divided between plenary sessions and four working groups. The Conference opened with speeches from Ministers of the Environment of Slovenia and Spain, Mr. Janez Podobnik and Mrs. Cristina Narbona and by the Director of the Directorate for Protecting the Natural Environment (European Commission), Mr. Ladislav Miko. They welcomed the initiative and stressed the importance and necessity of addressing threats posed by IAS.

In first plenary session representatives of important global initiatives (CBD, Bern Convention, CITES) presented their work in relation to IAS. Mr. Patrick Murphy, from the European Commission, introduced recent developments and expectations in preparation for the EU strategy on invasive alien species. Regional and local experiences and good practices were mentioned by representatives from Australia, New Zealand and the USA in the subsequent plenary session. The last plenary session provided conclusions arising from work done in four working groups and concluding ideas were gathered as a basis for a Conference Final Declaration, available on the Foundation web site, as well as the results of the Working Groups.

The above-mentioned working groups were divided according to topics discussed: Terrestrial IAS, Marine IAS, Freshwater IAS, and Islands and IAS. Work within each of the working groups was coordinated by the Chair and Co-Chair, supported by 2 competent experts and a rapporteur. Each working group, in the framework of its topic, covered several sub-topics. Firstly, the discussions addressed pathways of introduction and control where three main questions posed were: how are the IAS introduced, what are the specific impacts of IAS, and how they are or can be controlled; and secondly, possible policy tools for addressing IAS issues were discussed.

During the Conference, presentations were given by more than 30 experts from different European countries, plus representatives from the USA, New Zealand and Australia.

The Conference was attended by over 250 participants, representing 18 EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom) and several dozen Spanish NGOs. The event was covered by 19 media.

In addition to the Final Declaration, the results of the conference will be published in paperback by March 2008, with summaries of the plenary presentations and concluding points of the working groups.

Some of the main conclusions of the Conference, summarized also in the Final Declaration, are:

1. The threat of the Invasive Alien Species (IAS) is growing exponentially, causing damage to ecosystems and also to the economy and to human health.
2. Prevention is the most desirable response, but to be successful in prevention, we still must know more about the IAS biology and pathways.
3. Adequately supported early warning system and rapid response mechanisms are needed for taking efficient countermeasures in the early phases of IAS invasion.
4. It is essential to reach political commitment, to use already existing tools but also to develop and implement a specific framework on IAS, both at international and national level.
5. Codes of best practice focused on prevention should be developed.
6. Civil society participation is urgently required if we want to combat IAS effectively and efficiently.
7. Environmental education is vital for raising awareness about IAS.