

DRAFT

European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy

Informal discussion paper

The future of the EPBRS

Target audience

The attached discussion document is addressed to the participants of the European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy (EPBRS).

Purpose

This is a working document for EPBRS activities over the next few years. It should help to guide the activities of the platform and contribute to its sustainability.

Invitation to comment

This version (3.3¹) of the document is based on the work of the specialised working group on the future of the EPBRS. It is now provided in this draft form to all EPBRS participants.

The participants of the Danish Presidency EPBRS meeting will have the opportunity to comment on this draft document. If you have suggestions that would improve the wording in any way, please feel free to send your suggested *text* to us before the meeting. General comments on structure or organisation will be discussed during the plenary meeting.

We intend to produce a short version for interested parties outside the EPBRS.

Disclaimer

This document is an initiative of the EPBRS. It does not prejudice any proposal that the European Commission may make concerning the European Research Area and the 6th Framework Programme.

The issues raised and views expressed in this document may not be taken to represent a suggestion by, or state a position of the Research Directorate General, or the European Commission.

Author

This document has many authors, being constructed from substantial contributions from EPBRS participants. The identities of the people who contributed to the drafting teams are provided in an annexe to the document.

Please send your remarks to martin.sharman@cec.eu.int with a copy to karin.zaunberger@cec.eu.int.

¹ Ver 1.0 raw contributions

Ver 2.0 reworked to eliminate overlap between contributions

Ver 2.1 reworked to increase coherence between contributions

Ver 2.2 editorial changes to improve readability

Ver 3.0 incorporates written comments from working group on version 2.2

Ver 3.1. text reduced, overlaps reduced

Ver 3.2 tidied up, minor additions introduced

Ver 3.3 further written comments of working group incorporated

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European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy

Informal discussion paper

The future of the EPBRS

The EPBRS is an important element in the European Research Area (ERA) for biodiversity research.

The ERA was established to encourage adequate networking and co-operation, and to build a research equivalent of the common market by improving both the co-ordination of research activities and the convergence of national and EU research policies.

This document outlines the issues involved in developing the EPBRS into the future.

1. Context, Vision, Mission and Membership

1.1. Introduction

In defining the future of the EPBRS it is essential to understand its *context* and take account of the activities and mandates of other relevant groups, whether national, European or international.

The *vision* of the future status and activities of the EPBRS defines the necessary actions. The written *mission* statement of the purpose of the EPBRS can be used to define, initiate, evaluate, and refine its activities.

The context, vision and mission of the EPBRS influences its *membership*, both in terms of the number and the qualifications of the individuals that participate in its meetings.

1.2. Objectives

Context

The EPBRS strives to promote strategically important biodiversity research with concern for reduction of biodiversity loss, conservation, protection and wise use of the components of biodiversity.

The main policy framework for the EPBRS are the EU environmental Directives (notably the Birds² and Habitats³ Directives), the 6th Environmental Action Programme and the Convention on Biological Diversity, with the derived EU Biodiversity Strategy and the various national biodiversity action plans.

Many learned societies and scientific groups exist to promote and advance research on biodiversity. Each Member and Accession State and the European Community has established policy-making groups whose mandate is more or less directly associated with the conservation of biodiversity. National committees also provide the opportunity for dialogue between scientists and policy makers. The EPBRS fills an analogous niche to these national committees, by ensuring that the information flow between science and policy occurs between all states associated to the running Framework Programme⁴ and the European Commission.

² Council Directive 79/409/EEC

³ Council Directive 92/43/EEC

⁴ An associated state is a state that contributes to the budget of the 2002-2006 framework programme. This includes all the EU Member and Accession States (Bulgaria, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia). If the list contains the same states as for the 5th Framework Programme, it will also include Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Israel.

There are a large number of major initiatives and activities related to biodiversity research outside Europe. Some of the more relevant ones are outlined in Annex....

Vision

In the long term EPBRS should be a self-sustaining platform where prominent scientists, influential policymakers and stakeholders exchange views and combine forces to plan, implement and exploit the research needed to reduce biodiversity loss and underpin the conservation and sustainable use of the components of biodiversity in Europe.

Mission

The main elements of EPBRS mission were set out in the objectives it formulated in 2000:

1. Provide significant components of a European Research Area for biodiversity research.
1. Discuss EC biodiversity research strategies and priorities, including the important issues that might be addressed by Framework Programmes of research and other appropriate research-related initiatives, thus facilitating the work of the formal Programme Committees;
2. Disseminate between the participants knowledge of current best practices and the scientific understanding of biodiversity conservation;
3. Exchange information on national biodiversity activities, relevant research and networks, including groups working on themes related to biodiversity research, and on national infrastructure for biodiversity research;
4. Address issues of biodiversity research in key European ecosystems in a systematic way, including discussions of biodiversity research issues set out in the EC Communication on Biodiversity Strategy and those on the agenda of international multilateral meetings, thus supporting the work of the Council Environment working group (biodiversity);
5. Contribute to research to support and improve management plans for protected areas such as NATURA 2000 and the Emerald Network.

These objectives form the backdrop and rationale for *ad hoc* activities, for example, the creation of national biodiversity platforms.

The meetings of the EPBRS result in other substantial benefits for biodiversity research strategy. These include

- a. networking between participants leading to long-term bilateral co-operation and information exchange both within and outside the context of the EPBRS.
- b. opportunities for participants to stimulate partnership or network building between organisations in their home countries.
- c. opportunities for comparison of experiences regarding the role of science in the implementation of EU directives.
- d. an opportunity for EC and national officials to communicate up-to-the-minute information on emerging decisions in relation to biodiversity research in Europe.

Membership

Membership in the EPBRS should be open to all states that participate in the 6th Framework Programme and to the European Union Institutions. It should also be open by invitation to

organisations whose mission involves them in biodiversity science policy at a European scale. Other stakeholders should also be invited to participate at appropriate meetings.

The individuals who attend the meetings should be selected by the participating state⁵. Wherever possible members should be selected from national delegations to CBD SBSTTA meetings or at least be in close contact with those delegates. To help ensure the link between science and policy, the delegations should be composed of a senior scientist working in the field of biodiversity who has responsibilities related to policy making, and a policy-maker with responsibilities for biodiversity research. To ensure relevance to the main EU policy-making and policy-implementing activities, individuals should ideally also participate in national and EU-level discussions on the CBD, the environmental Directives, and the national biodiversity action plans. Where possible the participants should belong to the national biodiversity platform or an equivalent body.

1.3. Status

EPBRS is an informal platform for policy makers and scientists to exchange views and ideas to develop a biodiversity research strategy for Europe. The bi-annual EPBRS meetings have been systematically linked to the EU presidency. The maintenance of this status and the continuity of meetings are pivotal to the effectiveness of the EPBRS.

Since its inception, the agendas of the meetings of the EPBRS have tried to carefully balance science and policy. The scientific flavour of the meeting is important to give the policy makers sufficient depth of understanding to discuss the substantive issues constructively. The quality of the presentations, by eminent scientists and good communicators, has added greatly to the success of the meetings. The science policy discussions have led to significant results, including recommendations for the text of the work programme in the 6th Framework Programme (1.1.6.3).

Since the Belgian meeting a thematic network called BioPlatform⁶ has enabled its members and one or two representatives from the other countries to attend at the expense of the network.

The response of the participants to the format and outcome of the meetings has been generally positive. There has been a general agreement that a forum of this kind is important and useful for European science strategy, although justified criticism has been made of the uneven degree to which policy recommendations are communicated to the hierarchies and subsequently acted on within the Member States.

The Ponta Delgada agreement stated that stakeholders in the field⁷ should participate in meetings as appropriate. More of such representatives should be invited to the meetings.

⁵ In the past this has been achieved by asking the EESD Programme Committee, as an emanation of the Council of Ministers, to nominate members.

⁶ BioPlatform This thematic network exists to provide scientific, logistic and financial support to the activities of the EPBRS. More details are provided in the section on Status of the chapter on "Links with other groups, initiatives and activities. Note that three European initiatives are sometimes confused with one another: BioPlatform, EPBRS (The subject of this document, the informal "European platform for biodiversity research strategy" provides a forum for discussion between scientists and policy makers.) and BioForum (This thematic network examines the issues surrounding the implementation of the CBD's ecosystem approach. It concerns itself largely with the identification of potential conflicts between various interests surrounding biodiversity and with their resolution. It has no direct link with the EPBRS).

⁷ Including NGOs, governmental organizations dealing with biodiversity, representatives of conservation organisations (both *in* and *ex situ*), FAO centres, and private companies.

1.4. Analysis, Obstacles and Opportunities

Context

The EPBRS has given itself the vocation of informing debate on the Framework Programmes, on scientific aspects of international commitments related to biodiversity policy, and on the environmental Directives. The EPBRS must take the responsibility to help change the context in which it finds itself and to help influence events. It is therefore not enough to discuss these matters at the successive meetings of the group. The agreements of the meetings must be communicated to appropriate bodies in the participating states and the European Commission.

The informality of the working environment of the EPBRS is much appreciated by its participants, and leads to active and willing participation in the discussions from most participants. It would be advantageous to maintain this informal way of working while at the same time gaining greater institutional recognition and support.

Vision

By the end of the 6th Framework Programme the self-sustaining EPBRS

- should be widely recognised as an integral and important part of the ERA for biodiversity.
- should be the main European forum at which prominent scientists, influential policymakers and stakeholders exchange views and combine forces to plan, implement and exploit the research needed to underpin the conservation and sustainable use of components of biodiversity in Europe.
- should be widely known and its activities widely appreciated by the science community and by the science policy makers of the EU and the NAS.
- should consistently produce agreements that collectively have a significant impact in the Commission, Council and Parliament on the debate on the follow-up to the 6th framework programme.
- should provide helpful science policy advice for the European delegations to the CBD and to the Council Environment working group (biodiversity).
- should be the natural contact point for relevant organisations with a similar mandate outside Europe, and should provide support for a co-ordinated European contribution to international programmes such as ICSU and initiatives such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.
- should have become the **“European voice in biodiversity science policy matters”**.

Mission

The European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy provides a forum for biodiversity scientists and policy makers from the European Union and Accession States to co-operate to stimulate networks, co-ordinate research and develop a convergent national and EU science strategy to underpin the reduction of biodiversity loss and biodiversity conservation in Europe. The EPBRS communicates this strategy to those appropriate individuals and organisations that can ensure its effective implementation.

Membership

The strength of the EPBRS lies in its members among whom are several national delegates to SBSTTA. In referring to the members of the EPBRS we take care to use the word

“participant” rather than “delegate” in recognition that the participants do not represent their country in any formal sense since this is not a formal committee⁸.

A weakness of the EPBRS is the lack of continuity of participants for some countries. This diminishes the potential impact of the meetings as the contribution of a particular participant often increases in second and subsequent meetings. The personal bonds formed between participants also influence the meeting and subsequent communication and co-operation. Also with time participants are more able to identify the most relevant stakeholders in their countries and pass the information on the issues discussed and agreed in EPBRS to them. The benefits of a more regular membership have been seen in recent meetings, partly because of the financial stability provided by BioPlatform.

Most causes of biodiversity change are anthropogenic. Therefore the solutions are unlikely to be found in the natural sciences alone. The contribution of social scientists to the discussions of the EPBRS is therefore vital. At present the delegations from each participating state comprise one scientist and one policymaker, and the scientific representation is almost entirely drawn from the biological sciences. As a body, this means that the participants to the EPBRS do not possess as much socio-economic expertise as might be desired. Delegations of 3 people from each participating state – adding a social scientist to the present 2-person delegation - increase the cost of participating by 50%, add to the difficulties of hosting a much larger meeting, and change the dynamic of the discussions towards a more formal committee. This means that 3-persons delegations per country are probably neither feasible nor beneficial for the effectiveness or the long-term future of EPBRS. A preferable interim solution might be to invite a small number of socio-economists, not as nominees from the various participating states, but as advisers engaged *ad personam* by the Commission or by the organisers of the meetings.

1.5. Recommendations

To attain the objectives of the EPBRS will include further involvement of social scientists, improvement of biodiversity discussion structures within individual countries and increased emphasis on correctly identifying the recipients of the EPBRS agreements. The identity of the recipient will have a major bearing on the content and phrasing of the declaration.

Although strategies to facilitate biodiversity discussion may vary considerably from country to country, the EPBRS can provide a platform for comparison of these strategies and formulation of best practice. In many countries the most effective means of communication may be to use, or create, a national biodiversity platform, for scientists, policymakers and funding agencies to discuss biodiversity research strategy. Through the national platforms the EPBRS will gain visibility in individual countries and in the EU as a whole. This will make it easier to attract the most appropriate participants from each country.

At present the EPBRS depends heavily on the input of Commission staff. While the active role of the Commission is certainly welcomed, the EPBRS should function as an independent body. It should become a federation of National Biodiversity Platforms, driven by a common goal to unify biodiversity research policy in the EU.

EPBRS should support and encourage the creation of, and effective communication between, national biodiversity platforms (or equivalents).

⁸ This lack of official status has a positive effect in that it helps the meetings to find consensus quite easily. It does have a negative effect, however. The effectiveness of the EPBRS is reduced when participants do not have the national contacts or influence to guarantee that the agreements of the meetings will be delivered and explained to the relevant authorities within their countries. As a result the national impact of the EPBRS meetings is sometimes difficult to detect.

The participation of several EPBRS member countries could be improved. Participants should have a mandate from their governments to participate in the meetings of the EPBRS.

The disciplines represented among the scientific members should include but not be limited to biology. This will almost certainly require collaboration and co-ordination among the organisations that nominate scientists from the various participating states.

The Commission and/or the organiser of the meeting should invite 3-5 socio-economic experts to participate in meetings. The Ponta Delgada declaration stated that stakeholders in the field⁹ (including users of the deliverables from EPBRS) should participate in meetings as appropriate. Such representatives have rarely been invited to meetings to date.

1.6. First steps

Actions	actors	end date
a) Continuation of the communication between EPBRS participants / BioPlatform partners from countries with National Biodiversity Platforms and those without to allow for increased synergy supporting the establishment of National Platforms in all member countries. The aim should be that by mid 2004 National Biodiversity Platforms are established in all countries participating in EPBRS.	all EPBRS participants + BioPlatform	
b) Clear identification of the destination of the meeting declaration. Possibly formal link with SBSSTA with identified individual	EC and country of EU Presidency representatives at EPBRS	
d) Communication should be established with high-level officials in the countries whose current participation is could be enhanced explaining the role of the EPBRS and benefits for the countries of active participation.	BioPlatform partners?	
e) Special responsibility for particular ecosystems assigned to appropriate countries	all EPBRS participants	
f) EPBRS to be kept aware of relevant biodiversity programmes / projects within the EU and internationally to allow for co-ordinators to be invited to meetings	EC participants and all other participants	

⁹ Including NGOs, governmental organizations dealing with biodiversity, representatives of conservation organisations (both *in* and *ex situ*), FAO centres, and private companies.

2. Links with other groups, initiatives and activities

2.1. Introduction

EPBRS must take into account the agendas and activities of other relevant organisations to ensure on the one hand that its activities do not unnecessarily duplicate work of other relevant organisations, and on the other that it is aware of developments that will influence its deliberations. It should also provide such organisations with comprehensive information about its activities. These activities should be organised with a view to contribute to major international meetings, including SBSTTA and COP meetings of the CBD. It should contribute by (a) suggesting orientation for research whose results will be useful to the European delegations at these meetings and (b) providing information to these delegations about the main EPBRS results.

2.2. Objectives

Links between EPBRS with other groups, initiatives and activities should:

1. Improve the focus and impact of biodiversity research (closely linked to ERA, FP6)

Biodiversity will be one of the research priorities within FP6 and will contribute to the ERA. A common effort is needed to identify biodiversity research issues of high priority for the enlarged European Union.

2. Improve the policy relevance of biodiversity research

Sustainable development is high on the political agenda. Research is required to develop and implement EU and national policies in sectors with significant impact on biodiversity, including especially agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, industry, transport, and tourism.

3. Improve the scientific support to the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity

The wise use of the components of biodiversity, successful environmental monitoring and management of protected areas networks such as NATURA 2000 should be based on scientific results and recommendations. Conversely, to develop a sound and repeatable scientific approach to management, research could be focused on the issues in which, in the absence of science, intuition or practical experience has been effective.

In assessing whether a link should be established the following criteria should be used:

- Efficiency
- Policy relevance
- Benefit for the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity

Networking activities should aim at:

- Capacity Building
- Supporting interdisciplinary approaches
- Dialogue between researchers and policy makers
- Linking national biodiversity research issues to ERA
- Disseminating EPBRS findings nationally

2.3. Status

The various organisations and initiatives that are relevant to the EPBRS activities may be classified in two ways: by the nature of the main mission of the organisation (science, policy etc.) or by the scale of the organisation (national, international etc.). By constructing a grid from these classifications, it is possible to identify examples of organisations that are potentially relevant, as shown in the table below.

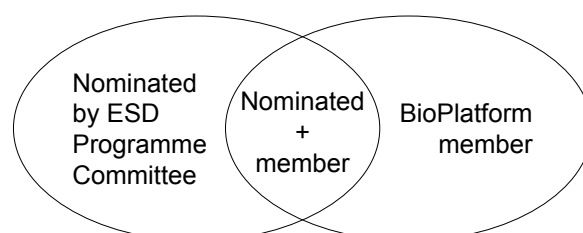
	European Union	Pan-European	International	National
Science	EU projects	ESF, COST, European learned societies	DIVERSITAS, Learned societies, SCOPE	Universities, laboratories, museums and collections
Policy	Council, EP, DG ENV, AG, FISH	Council of Europe	CBD, Ramsar, CCD, FCCC	Ministries of Environment, Ag, Forest, Fish
Science policy	Programme Committee, DG RTD (FP6, ERA), EEA	PEBLDS / ECNC [EPBRS]	GBIF	Ministry of Research, Environment agencies, Biodiversity Platforms
Conservation		NATURA 2000, Emerald Network	IUCN, BirdLife, other NGOs, WCMC	National Parks and Reserves, herbaria, gene banks
Information	EU CHM	EU BiodiversityScience electronic group	CHMs, Millennium Assessment	National CHM
Funding	DG RTD	EUREKA	IGFA	Science foundations, Research councils
Co-ordination	BioPlatform, MARBENA		ICSU	

Up to now the EPBRS has focused on biodiversity research and policy relevance, the latter concentrating on core biodiversity business such as CBD (SBSTTA), EU-CHM and EEA.

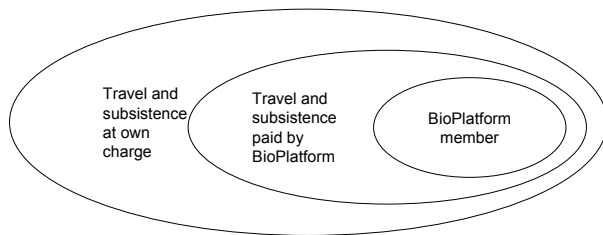
The EPBRS has discussed many activities related to biodiversity research and its political relevance (including CBD, EU Biodiversity Action plans, and NATURA 2000.) EPBRS has evolved as a recognised and acknowledged player in the field, especially at the EU level. This success is partly due to networking and linking activities.

Promoting and establishing national platforms is in its scoping phase, strongly supported by BioPlatform. This will be a priority for the EPBRS-related workshop in Poland that is scheduled before spring 2003. BioPlatform is a thematic network¹⁰ that exists to provide scientific, logistic and financial support to the activities of the EPBRS. It helps the host country and the Commission to organise a series of EPBRS meetings connected with the EU presidencies. It runs electronic conferences in preparation of the EPBRS meetings, and organises the deliverables produced by the EPBRS. It helps to set up national biodiversity platforms and helps to connect them together and with the EPBRS.

At each meeting of the EPBRS, there are presently three kinds of participants as shown in the diagram.



¹⁰ Its members come from AT, BE, CH, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GR, IE, IT, NL, NO, PT, SE, SK, and UK. Membership is being extended to include BG, CY, CZ, EE, HU, LT, LV, MT, PL, RO, and SI.



BioPlatform pays travel and subsistence costs for some scientific representatives of the 32 countries that participate in the EU 5th Framework RTD programme. Beneficiaries are mostly from the New Accession States.

With the support of BioPlatform the presence of participants from the New Associated States has been strengthened. BioPlatform also makes a very substantial contribution to the other costs of hosting the meetings.

2.4. Analysis, obstacles and opportunities

When EPBRS was initiated, there was no coherent plan about its contact to other organisations. There has been no analysis of the benefit that the EPBRS can bring to outside organisations or *vice versa*. The EPBRS does not have a web site or other Internet presence. At present information about EPBRS can be found on the BioPlatform website.

The EPBRS has made contact with a few organisations, notably DIVERSITAS, GBIF, Species 2000 and the EC CHM (through the EEA). Links with other organisations should be established or reinforced. One of the reasons for this haphazard approach has been the lack of a dedicated secretariat that could create and execute such a plan.

2.5. Recommendations

The EPBRS should develop a networking strategy that supports the three main fields outlined above: biodiversity research, policy relevance, and the scientific support to reduction of biodiversity loss and sustainable use of the components of biodiversity.

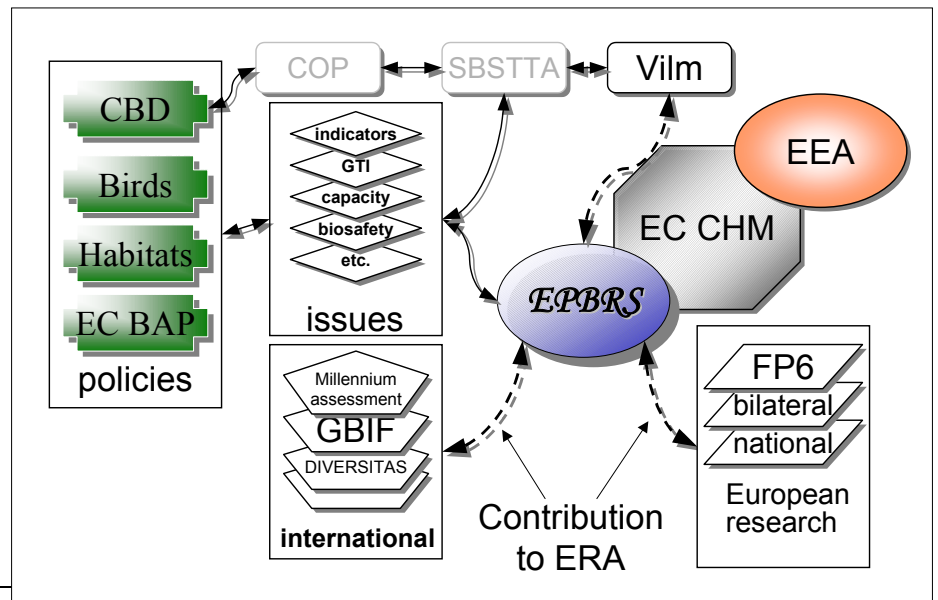
An EPBRS website should be set up, possibly starting with one or two pages on the BioPlatform web site that are recognisably “owned” by the EPBRS, and that would continue beyond the support of BioPlatform.

EPBRS “success stories” should be propagated in order to establish new contacts/ promoting, establishing new national platforms.

The EPBRS should establish links to the public, media, and NGOs to discover partners that help to support the goals of biodiversity promotion and protection.

The EPBRS could usefully add value to the electronic European Community clearing-house mechanism by:

- exchanging information relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of the components of biological diversity, including results of scientific and socio-economic research;
- promoting international scientific co-operation in the field of conservation and



sustainable use of the components of biological diversity, thus helping to implement the Convention, bearing in mind the declarations made at the World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002.

For this reason the platform might participate more formally in the CHM mechanism and process to the potential benefit of all Parties concerned.

The diagram shows this potentially close association, and other advantageous links with some of the relevant organisations and initiatives (including the Millennium Assessment, the GBIF and Diversitas).

It is important that the EPBRS does not duplicate the role of any existing organisation that advises on biodiversity research and policy within the EU.

2.6. First steps

Actions	actors	end date
Review existing structures that advise on EU biodiversity research policy and analyse gaps in the current services provided.	EPBRS members	GR EPBRS meeting
Compile a list of key organisations that are active in biodiversity research, policy relevance, and the scientific support to the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity	Bioplatform (WP8) helped by other EPBRS participants	
Elaborate a timeline of key dates in the political calendar	EC and other EPBRS participants	
Elaborate work packages according to these key dates	Appointed EPBRS / Bioplatform partners	
Strengthen and maintain links with FP6 and the ERA	Appointed EPBRS / Bioplatform partners	
Link with National Biodiversity Platforms	Bioplatform (WP1) and other EPBRS participants	
Linking with biodiversity information facilities like GBIF	EC or appointed EPBRS / Bioplatform partners	
Establish, strengthen and maintain links with national, EU and international institutions (DG Environment, DG Agriculture, DG Fisheries, EEA, EP, SBSTTA, CHMs), and with NGOs such as IUCN, WWF and Bird Life.	EC or appointed EPBRS / Bioplatform partners	
Establish and maintain links with bodies involved in implementing and monitoring NATURA 2000, Emerald Network, Ramsar Convention, and agri-environmental schemes.	Bioplatform and other EPBRS participants	
Evaluate and communicate the results of eGroups, eConferences, and EPBRS meetings	Bioplatform. MARBENA and other EPBRS participants	
Moderate EUBiodiversityScience electronic group	EC or Appointed	

Investigate the possibility of a more formal link with SBSTTA	EPBRS / Bioplatform partners	SBSTTA- meeting (March 03)
Invite co-ordinators of national, European or international initiatives and projects to participate in meetings and to communicate the results of the projects they co-ordinate.	EC or Appointed EPBRS / Bioplatform partners Organising committee of EPBRS meetings	

3. Orientation, priorities, operational goals and interim objectives

3.1. Introduction

The orientation of the EPBRS was made clear from the outset in the statement issued after the Saariselkä meeting under the Finnish presidency of the EU and the declaration of the Ponta Delgada meeting under the Portuguese presidency. This orientation resulted in the mission statement in section 1.

The mission statement determines in broad terms the priorities of the EPBRS: co-operation, networking, co-ordination of research, the development of a convergent national and EU science strategy, and the communication of this strategy to appropriate organisations.

The operational goals and interim objectives are closely linked to the deliverables of the EPBRS. By establishing a set of feasible goals the progress of the group can be assessed.

3.2. Objectives

The operational goals of the EPBRS are:

- To become widely known and have its activities widely appreciated both by the science community and by the science policy makers.
- To constitute an integral and important part of the ERA for biodiversity.
- To secure the necessary political and financial support from outside the framework programme for the EPBRS to be self-sustaining.
- To accomplish all the steps necessary to achieve the vision set out in 1.4.

3.3. Status

The EPBRS has focused on information exchange in the field of biodiversity research and developing biodiversity research strategies on selected topics.

3.4. Analysis, obstacles and opportunities

The EPBRS is needed and useful. There are no major obstacles for achieving the original or new goals of EPBRS. It is up to EPBRS participants to make it work, both during their meetings and in carrying the message back home. There is considerable interest among other stakeholders and end-users of biodiversity information to contribute to the work of EPBRS.

The themes of the meetings have been in one sense incoherent; some have focused on ecosystems (e.g. forest and water), some on drivers (e.g. invasive species), some on biogeography (e.g. islands and archipelagos), and so on. Although this approach has considerable use and interest, it might be preferable to approach the broad range of possible topics in a more structured way. For example, a series of three or four meetings could look at the main drivers of biodiversity change in Europe, and the next three or four on ecosystems of major European importance. The disadvantage of this approach is that political/scientific/social changes are not taken into account, which can make other themes more pressing at a given time. It can also impose themes that are not interesting enough for the country that organises the meetings.

3.5. Recommendations

EPBRS should take a keen interest in developing a global scientific research strategy for the EU Framework Programme Countries. At the same time EPBRS should take more action to disperse its views to the European and international organisations with emphasis on international conventions (CBD), programs (DIVERSITAS) and organisations. It should create a list of biodiversity research issues categorised by priority in to 3 groups: urgent and

important, urgent but less important, and important but not urgent. The issues should be chosen to correspond in scope and depth with the kind of discussion that can be handled in a single meeting, and that should be of considerable interest to the Member States. Successive hosts of the meeting could then be invited to select issues for the theme of their meeting.

The EPBRS should constantly strive to improve the exchange of information and communication among researchers and between researchers, policy makers and other stakeholders by maintaining a discussion forum and by organising meetings, congresses and whatever other *ad hoc* activities would be effective at the time. BioPlatform should take the lead in these activities.

EPBRS should

- analyse and review biodiversity research, and improve communication between researchers and end-users.
- encourage researchers to identify, bring out and promote the policy-related use of their research achievements.
- bring together European and national initiatives and projects and the understanding gained in them.
- promote communication and collaboration between scientists and end-users.

3.6. First steps

Actions	actors	end date
Develop a global scientific research strategy for the EU Framework Programme Countries.	EPBRS participants	
Transmit EPBRS views to the European and international organisations.	EC and Appointed EPBRS/BioPlatform members	
Enhance communication between researchers and end-users.	Task force	
Create a list of prioritised biodiversity research issues	BioPlatform	
Maintain a virtual discussion forum	BioPlatform	
Coordinate the organisation of meetings, congresses etc.	BioPlatform	
Analyse and review biodiversity research	Working groups	
Encourage researchers to identify and promote the policy-related use of their research achievements.	Task force (huge)	
Bring together the understanding gained in national, European and international initiatives	Working group	

4. Work programme and deliverables

4.1. Introduction

The *work programme* is of major importance to the EPBRS, because it will allow the forum to prioritise the issues that it deals with. The better the work programme, the more useful will be the deliverables. The work programme identifies the tasks that will enable the EPBRS to reach its goals and provides a plan to complete the tasks. Much of the work programme will be executed in successive meetings of the group, so that the agendas for the meetings are an integral part of the work programme. Some tasks will be undertaken between meetings. Each task will be unambiguously described in a sentence or two, associated with a person or group, and scheduled for a definite time. Each task results in a deliverable.

A *deliverable* is the product or information that is the result of completing a task.

Some of the work of the EPBRS will result in formal deliverables intended for use by the Services of the Commission, the Member States or by other external users, but some may result in informal products whose main user will be the EPBRS itself.

4.2. Objectives

In the *long term* the work programme for the EPBRS will allow it to contribute constructively to a coherent science strategy in the field of biodiversity not only for the European Community, but also globally.

In the *medium term* the work programme should focus on

Science and policy

- identifying issues of major importance and consequence for biodiversity science policy
- identifying significant gaps in knowledge that reduces the effectiveness of policy
- identifying significant gaps in science policy or legislation for which scientific knowledge suggests a particular course of action
- building a consensus on the priorities for biodiversity research in Europe
- identifying a set of topics that should be discussed by the EPBRS at its meetings

Strategy

- identifying best practice in converting priority wish lists into science action plans
- identifying and implementing best practice in getting science action plans onto policy and funding agendas

4.3. Status

Up to the present, the organisers of the successive meetings of the EPBRS have set the work programme. Thus the group has dealt with islands and archipelagos, invasive organisms, water and forest, biodiversity conservation, and Mediterranean biodiversity. *Deliverables* have been the “agreements” of the successive meetings, which have focused on thematic issues selected for discussion.

Other topics that have been discussed include:

- 6th Framework Programme: Opportunities for research; Biodiversity research in ERA; Discussion paper on research topics; Integrating taxonomy and the great collections

- "Research support to policy – social contract"¹¹
- *Ad hoc* working parties
- Convention on Biological diversity: Conference of the Parties and subsidiary bodies; EU Clearing-House Mechanism
- Data bases: invasive organisms; organisations active in biodiversity
- DIVERSITAS
- Electronic Conferences
- ERA – biodiversity:
- Millennium Assessment
- NATURA 2000

These discussions have not led to any formal deliverables¹². Work between meetings has been *ad hoc* in response to the needs of the forthcoming meeting.

4.4. *Analysis, obstacles and opportunities*

This meeting-by-meeting *work programme* has had the following consequences:

- Relatively easy inclusion of the EPBRS meeting on the Presidency agenda (+)
- Relatively strong interest from scientists and policy makers of the host country (+)
- Absence of any gap analysis of what important topics should be discussed (-)
- Lack of any systematic approach to topics to be addressed (-)
- Lack of coherence and continuity of work between meetings (-)

The focus on the single format of the formal *deliverable* has had the following consequences:

- Relative ease in producing a formal deliverable designed to a stable formula (+)
- Sense of purpose and accomplishment at the end of the meeting (+)
- Rather generic statements that may repeat those of earlier meetings (-)
- Lack of substantial cumulative deliverable on which to base further action (-)

Early assumptions

The major assumptions are that:

1. meetings maintain a balanced science policy orientation, straying neither too much towards science nor towards policy;
2. meetings are constructed in two parts, the first around a science theme and the second focusing more on science policy;
3. rotating meetings from one host state to another benefits the aims of the EPBRS;
4. the host state (that is, successive EU presidencies) sets the main science theme of the meetings;
5. the science policy agenda for the second part of the meetings is set largely in response to current issues and events;
6. work identified by the participants as necessary if the EPBRS is to produce anything tangible is carried out between meetings either by participants to the EPBRS in addition to their normal responsibilities, or by BioPlatform, in *ad hoc* working parties;

¹¹ This comment was added by a contributor, but the drafting team feels that it should be explained in more detail in the text.

¹² An informal deliverable has been the *Discussion paper on research topics* which has proved (marginally) useful in outlining the topics that should be included in the work programme of FP6. *BioPlatform* has been an "informal deliverable" resulting from discussions and actions of participants to the EPBRS.

7. the only formal deliverable is a formulaic agreement.

New assumptions

Assumption 1, 3 and 6 are maintained. The remaining assumptions are replaced by the following:

1. a coherent EPBRS work programme resulting in useful deliverables can be designed;
2. such a programme should cover both the science and policy parts of the meetings, and should be designed to give better structure and increase the worth of successive meetings and to allow the EPBRS to progress logically, purposefully and productively through a known agenda towards a known goal;
3. [*previous assumption 3*] rotating meetings from one host state to another benefits the aims of the EPBRS;
4. the host state should have the freedom to select a topic of particular interest to that state, but the range of choice should be constrained by the work programme of the EPBRS;
5. the topics identified in the EPBRS discussion document can be used as the scientific basis for the work programme, but issues not directly related to themes of biodiversity research will also be included in the work programme;
6. the formulaic meeting agreements are useful and should be maintained
7. [*previous assumption 6*] work identified by the participants as necessary if the EPBRS is to produce anything tangible is carried out between meetings either by participants to the EPBRS in addition to their normal responsibilities, or by BioPlatform, within its responsibilities (e.g. Catalogue, draft papers for discussion produced by the preceding e-conferences, other deliverables from meetings) and in *ad hoc* working parties;
8. [*previous assumption 1*] meetings shall maintain a balanced science policy orientation, straying neither too much towards science nor towards policy;
9. the participants will review and revise the format of the meetings.

Issues and alternative strategies

Meetings should focus on two issues: (1) “*policy gaps*”: what is known but is not yet incorporated into policy or legislation or taken into account in political debate on the subject, and (2) “*science gaps*”: what gaps exist in our understanding that should be filled so that we may make suggestions to improve legislation or policy in due course when the results are available.

Several alternatives could be used to structure the work programme.

External initiatives

The schedule could be determined largely by international events outside the EU. Example: plan EPBRS meetings around the agenda of the CBD. Advantages: (1) By selecting topics for discussion early enough, it should be possible to allow time for the deliberations of the EPBRS to be used in the preparation of those external events. (2) The EPBRS would gain stature and political support if such links were established and accepted. Disadvantages: (1) The level of debate in such external events is often highly political and not dependent on scientific input. (2) The nature and range of topics touched on by these external events might not be of the most pressing significance to Europe.

EU initiatives

The agendas of events under the control of the Council, Parliament or the Commission could be used to determine the topics discussed. Advantages: (1) Topics would be of direct importance to Europe. (2) The EPBRS could play a direct role in establishing Community plans. (3) In many cases the agenda of internal EU events is relevant to, if not determined by, external events of the kind mentioned in the previous paragraph, so this alternative gains

some of the advantages of the previous one. Disadvantages: (1) It may not be easy to get some issues of major scientific importance onto the agendas of meetings of Council, Parliament or the Commission. (2) Agendas for meetings are not often known months in advance, which would make it impossible for the organisers of an EPBRS meeting to focus the meeting on relevant topics. (3) The meetings often cover a wider range of topics than the EPBRS can comfortably deal with in the time available.

Systematic, prioritised process

It might be possible to proceed through a list of topics without reference to any external events. The degree of urgency or importance of the subject would suggest the sequence.

Advantages: (1) Topics would normally be of great and direct scientific importance to Europe. (2) A systematic approach would make it easier to ensure that no major gaps were left. Disadvantages: (1) The lack of a link with outside events would make the relevance of the work doubtful.

Hybrid process

The EPBRS could establish a list of priority issues as in the systematic process, but modify it ad hoc with reference to relevant international or EU initiatives and events. This would require continuous maintenance of the list.

4.5. Recommendation

The hybrid alternative should be used.

All EPBRS participants should take seriously their responsibility to act as channels for the dissemination of the agreement and of the results of EPBRS discussions in their home countries.

A Brussels based EPBRS secretariat should be established, which should build and maintain close links with relevant EU bodies including those that are responsible for sectors such as forestry, agriculture, fisheries and industry that are crucially important for sustainable development. The secretariat would manage the EPBRS website. This website could start up from the BioPlatform website with the tendency to take over towards the ending of the thematic network

The work programme should place priority on issues that link ecosystems and their interactions with human activities.

The agreement of the meeting remains the condensed key deliverable. Further deliverables should include abstracts of EU research, syntheses and summaries of relevant news, proceedings of EPBRS meetings, and such elements as protocols for conservation research and implementation.

Some of the deliverables should be maintained on the Bioplatform web site, which should also maintain up to date links to other agencies and groups.

4.6. First steps

Actions	actors	end date
Establish EPBRS secretariat		
Identify appropriate bodies in Council, Parliament and the Commission that deal with biodiversity		
Establish contact with secretary of each relevant body and find out how to be informed on items on the agenda		

5. Structures and mechanisms to implement and monitor the work

5.1. Introduction

EPBRS cannot be effective if all of its work is restricted to two 2- or 3-day meetings a year preceded by an electronic conference. Work must go on between meetings, not only to prepare the meetings themselves, but also to follow them up and to undertake the necessary work identified during the course of the meetings. Such homework requires quantifiable deliverables, deadlines, and statements of the subjects to be covered, with distinct assignment of duties. It must be clear who will receive the deliverables and for what purpose.

Furthermore, work undertaken between meetings that is not part of a contract, as in Bioplatform is not currently monitored in any systematic way, with the consequence that busy people may tend to put off what they see as off-line activities. Effective monitoring depends on monitoring groups, and an accepted authority that will receive the monitoring reports.

Finally, strategic decisions that guide the work of the EPBRS are currently taken largely by the Commission staff. This process could be made more participatory, perhaps by establishing. It is suggested to set up a governing board (5 members and 2 substitutes).

5.2. Objectives

It is expected that a more strategic approach would strengthen the relevance of EPBRS

It should establish formal and transparent procedures for the establishment of resolutions and recommendations, and maintain a formal and well-defined list of future, current, and completed tasks.

5.3. Status

The work of the EPBRS is currently achieved mainly in meetings hosted by the successive EU presidencies. The themes addressed in the meetings have been chosen because they are of particular relevance to the organising country, while also having a European relevance. In some cases they were also chosen because they were important items on forthcoming CBD meetings.

The scope of biodiversity research is huge, and the progress of the EPBRS through this immense landscape is limited to one topic every 6 months. To move faster the forum has established specialised working groups to analyse policy needs for research in relation to particular ecosystems. This mechanism helps to ensure that the interests of target ecosystems are formally represented. The mandate for these specialised working groups is provided in annexe. Each group would investigate a particular theme, with the following aims:

- To identify key individuals, groups, networks, resources, events, and political or science-policy processes of particular relevance to its theme;
- To review the state of scientific knowledge on the theme;
- To identify strategically significant gaps in our understanding in the theme;
- To review and comment on SBSTTA documents on the theme;
- To outline the elements of a work plan to reduce or eliminate those gaps.

No formal EPBRS secretariat, advisory board or steering committee exists. Part of the function of such a body is provided by the Commission and other part is provided by Bioplatform. This involves strategic decisions as well as day to day secretariat work including the maintenance of address lists and inviting participants to successive meetings.

The EPBRS is supported by the EU-funded BioPlatform thematic network whose aim is to:

1. help EPBRS to improve the effectiveness and relevance of European biodiversity research and monitoring by networking scientists and policy makers from the 32 countries that contribute to the EU 5th Framework RTD programme.
2. help organise four EPBRS meetings connected with the presidencies of Belgium, Spain, Denmark, Greece and a fifth meeting in the country that will have the presidency after Greece or in the U.K if the rotation presidencies will finish after Greece.
3. organise preparatory discussions on selected themes in advance to the EPBRS meetings in the form of Electronic Conferences.
4. build and maintain a web-site.
5. organise the deliverables produced by the EPBRS.
6. perform a “gap analysis” of the Biodiversity research currently funded by the EU and member states.
7. promote and link National biodiversity platforms/networks with EPBRS with and other European and International Biodiversity Organisations to promote a European Biodiversity Research Area.

The EPBRS aims to promote and encourage national biodiversity platforms, which may take a variety of shapes and forms, suited to the needs and administrative landscape of their country. Most have some component of research, and many are linked to policy. Some employ permanent staff, others are *ad hoc* committees meeting more or less sporadically. Most of them aim to:

- encourage researchers to join policy discussions and help the flow of information between scientists and policy makers by organising workshops and working groups and by maintaining and providing access to databases of scientists, institutions and acronyms, relevant documents and journals;
- help researchers to form networks, and encourage constructive mobility, to concentrate research skills, explore ways to co-operate, and understand barriers to co-operation;
- gather and analyse information on national biodiversity research;
- identify and prioritise the research to fill gaps in biodiversity knowledge needed to support national, European and international policy on biodiversity, recommend these areas as research themes for funding organisations, and encourage high-quality, multidisciplinary, innovative research in these priority areas;
- identify research to help Ministries to prepare or implement national biodiversity action plans;
- raise public awareness and promote scientific, technical, social, legal and economic knowledge of biological diversity in such a way as to encourage the conservation of biological diversity;
- promote and disseminate biodiversity research results in political, administrative and scientific communities and where possible add value to the efforts of the national research community;
- contribute to the European Platform on Biodiversity Research Strategy and to international negotiations.

These national platforms are the principal way in which the results and findings of the EPBRS can be transmitted to the appropriate authorities in the Member States.

5.4. *Analysis, obstacles and opportunities*

The potential impact of the EPBRS is proportional to the work carried out by its members, and the workload will probably increase with the new objectives and tasks. Between meetings, most of the participants carry out EPBRS work voluntarily, in addition to their normal jobs. To ensure that the EPBRS carries out its self-assigned task, a monitoring regime is required, and such a regime will only be effective if EPBRS functions well.

5.5. *Recommendations*

Governments or other national organisations, which mandate staff to participate in EPBRS should take into account that this involvement will have resource implications and that the staff member should be expected to devote some time each month to EPBRS activities.

In the long-term the possibility to establish an EPBRS secretariat with a co-ordinator whose work is funded by a national or EU body should be investigated. For the moment an extension of Biopatform (Biopatform 2) could be the way to continue to have people dedicate full time to EPBRS.

The specialised working groups should be led by EPBRS participants and should include where appropriate the co-ordinators or participants of EU-funded projects and others invited by the co-ordinators. The membership of the groups may change as its requirements for specialised expertise changes.

5.6. *First steps*

Actions	actors	end date
Agree on the mandate of a formal EPBRS secretariat	EPBRS participants	
Agree on financial arrangement for EPBRS secretariat	EPBRS participants	
Establish EPBRS secretariat	EPBRS participants	
Formalize mandate for EPBRS participants	EPBRS participants	
Agree on the mandate of a governing board for EPBRS	EPBRS participants	
Establish a governing board for EPBRS	EPBRS participants	
Agree on a process that ensures systematic follow-up of each EPBRS meeting (including delivery of results to identified organisations)	EPBRS participants	
Organise a process that ensures systematic follow-up of meetings	Host of the current meeting, steering group, host of the next meeting	8 weeks after meeting

6. Sustaining the EPBRS

6.1. Introduction

The EPBRS requires continuing political support and resources and commitment from Member States to perform the tasks and deliver the outcomes described in the preceding sections and to sustain the long-term future of EPBRS

6.2. Objectives

The Objectives are:

- to secure political support and resources from Member States to host meetings under the rotating EU Presidency;
- to secure commitment from EC, Member and Associated States to enable ‘public servants’ to contribute effectively and participate fully in EPBRS meetings and ongoing tasks within their normal duties;
- to secure funding to enable support for the organisation of electronic conferences, meetings linked to EU Presidency, workshops and co-ordination in the period from 2005 (possible extension of BioPlatform)
- to promote the development and effective networking of National Platforms to undertake tasks on behalf of the European Platform.

6.3. Status

Up to the present EPBRS has built on four main pillars:

1. the staff of the Research DG for direction and organisation;
2. resources provided by rotating EU Presidency for individual meetings;
3. since December 2001 resources from the FP5 Thematic Network ‘BioPlatform’
4. representatives and invited scientific experts at meetings.

The costs for item (iii) are approximately €150 000 per year, covering two electronic conferences and two meetings. BioPlatform has resources to contribute to the organisation of three further EPBRS meetings under the Danish and Greek Presidencies and a third meeting yet to be assigned.

6.4. Analysis, obstacles and opportunities

The establishment of EPBRS has been achieved by the successful manipulation of three main motivations held by the participating parties. First, the interests of the research community in securing funding from the EC Framework Programmes, improving research networks and understanding policy needs. Second, the interests of the EC and Member States in securing greater relevance and better value in publicly-funded science in Europe. And thirdly, the interests of the rotating Presidencies in promoting their own agenda in Europe and raising the profile of biodiversity research domestically. The EPBRS will continue to develop so long as it can sustain these three constituent interests. Consequently the main obstacles to the long-term success of EPBRS will be:

1. The lack of incentive to researchers if they do not perceive that they will gain an advantage in furthering their research interests. Researchers will need to see real benefits in shaping the research agenda, building scientific capacity, establishing cross-disciplinary networks and ultimately securing funding.
2. The lack of commitment from science policy representatives, if they do not perceive that they are influencing EU and national research programmes in favour of policy priorities (e.g. arising from CBD COP/SBSSTA, Natura 2000 and EU Biodiversity Strategy) and

securing better value from expenditure on research, taking account of national interests. Commitment and resources for EPBRS depend on the ability to demonstrate real benefits.

3. The tension between the individual aspirations of the rotating Presidencies and the need for a directed programme of work. The uncertainty over the Presidency following Greece may pose a significant problem for maintaining the momentum of the EPBRS.
4. The difficulty of maintaining and adjusting the balance between these competing interests.

The EPBRS will achieve its potential, if it is well organised and productive. At present the core work of EPBRS depends on voluntary work. To secure continuity EPBRS work must become recognised as part of the individual job task. This could be seen as sort of a “shared cost contribution” of the organisations employing EPBRS participants. It is obvious that this approach requires a more institutionalised EPBRS.

Current opportunities must be capitalised on:

1. The use of BioPlatform to maintain continuity and organisational support for EPBRS;
2. The development and networking of National Platforms to enlarge the capacity of EPBRS and create more effective linkages between national and European research programmes;
3. Effective links and shared priorities with other EU and national policy implementation and science co-ordination bodies (e.g. EEA CHM, DIVERSITAS etc);
4. Relevant research projects funded by the Community could contribute to EPBRS activities.

6.5. Recommendations

1. Establish a secretariat and a governing body for EPBRS to co-ordinate the activities of the EPBRS, represent the different interest groups, involve the forthcoming Presidencies (excluding the next two) and maintain continuity.
2. Promote EPBRS more effectively amongst other European institutions and nationally, raise the profile and recognition;
3. Provide guidance for development and networking of National Platforms to extend the capacity and influence of EBPRS;
4. Identify continuing support for EPBRS within FP6 and from other sources.

6.5. First steps

Actions	actors	end date
Formulate and agree proposals for a governing body	EPBRS Denmark	
Ensure easy access to information about EBPRS	BioPlatform	
Hold workshop for exchange of experience of National Platforms	BioPlatform, National Platforms	
Seek opportunities to promote EPBRS	EC, BioPlatform, National Platforms	
Identify potential funding sources		
Resolve uncertainty about future Presidency meetings	EC	