

Convention on Biological Diversity

Fourth National Report of the Netherlands

April 2010

**Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality
Department of Nature, Landscape and Rural Affairs
The Hague, the Netherlands**

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Contents

<i>Chapter</i>		<i>Page</i>
Executive summary		7
Chapter I	Overview of biodiversity: status, trends and threats	11
Chapter II	Current status of national biodiversity strategies and action plans	23
Chapter III	Sectoral and cross-sectoral integration or mainstreaming of biodiversity considerations	39
Chapter IV	Conclusions: progress towards the 2010 target and implementation of the Strategic Plan	43
References		63
Appendix I	Information concerning reporting Party and preparation of national report	69
Appendix II	Further sources of information	71
Appendix III	Progress towards targets of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation and the Programme of Work on Protected Areas	73

Executive summary

General developments in the Netherlands regarding biodiversity and policy

The Netherlands is among the most densely populated countries. In addition, the majority of its terrestrial area is covered by highly productive agricultural lands and pristine ecosystems are currently virtually absent in the Netherlands. Consequently, when taking the early 20th century as a reference for the state of current biodiversity in this country, as is the case in some indicators in external evaluations of Dutch domestic nature policy, a relative unfavourable picture might emerge.

Nonetheless, ecological processes inevitably still do occur in the Netherlands, and, for example, animal species composition has not changed dramatically over the 20th century (Koomen *et al.* 1995). Furthermore, the Netherlands has spent much effort in safeguarding and restoring existing nature as well as in creating "new" nature. This has to result in the realization of a sound National Ecological Network (NEN) by around 2018. The NEN will also include many areas of particular importance that have been designated under the EU Birds Directive and Habitats Directive. Since 1990, realization of the NEN is the backbone of Dutch domestic nature policy and it provides new ecological opportunities for "old" species resulting in areas with high nature values. As such, the corresponding targets are in line with several CBD targets on protected areas. The NEN areas also increasingly represent a variety of economic values, for example, when taking important ecosystem services, including recreational opportunities into account. Further, current biodiversity policy also addresses an advise of the so-called *Deltacommissie* to combine nature and water management efforts for the sake of climate adaptation.

The Netherlands has also a sophisticated level of collecting and processing biodiversity data. Due to this, the Netherlands is amongst the nations with the first and most comprehensive online national species catalogues. In 2010, the Netherlands Centre for Biodiversity Naturalis has also been launched. This centre combines the efforts of several Dutch taxonomic institutes. Further, the Netherlands has also published a relative large number of national red lists. Although the lists do reflect unfavourable trends regarding species, they also show a high level of knowledge about the national biodiversity, particularly among thousands of volunteers participating in nature survey NGOs (*Particuliere Gegevensbeherende Organisaties*).

Further, regarding biodiversity outside the Netherlands, the Dutch government also spends substantial amounts of development assistance on initiatives contributing to the sustainable use of biodiversity.

Nonetheless, even compared to more recent references (e.g., 1950 or 1982), many species populations in the Netherlands have declined or are further declining. Factors considered to have contributed to the long-term decline (i.e., over the 20th century) of populations of animal species include large-scale hydraulic works, organic pollution and salinization, the disappearance of eelgrass beds in the Wadden Sea, straightening of water courses, reclaiming of heathlands and grasslands as well as the subsequent acidification, eutrophication and desiccation of these lands, and the disappearance of flowery areas (Koomen *et al.* 1995). Factors considered to have been involved in the long-term decline (i.e., over the 20th century) of plant species (including lichens, algae and macrofungi) include air pollution, nitrogen deposition, habitat destruction (including of heathlands, grasslands, moors and dunes), the disappearance of eelgrass beds in the Wadden Sea, increased water temperatures, acidification and eutrophication of waters, and decreased vitality of forests (Van der Meijden *et al.* 1995).

Particularly during the late sixties and seventies, societal and political concern with environmental issues has grown and the Netherlands has developed a considerable body of spatial, environmental and nature legislation and policy since then. Part of the legislation and policy aims at implementing international treaties, such as the CBD, and EU regulations. In short, the variety of measures has had inhibiting effects on

biodiversity decline, although several targets, notably regarding the realization of the NEN and the reduction of nitrogen emissions and depositions, still remain challenging, including with reference to CBD targets.

In addition, concern with biodiversity outside the Netherlands has increased and corresponding policy focuses on realizing more sustainable international trade and production chains to facilitate the integration of social and ecological conditions and promote the production and trade of sustainable products. The Netherlands also stimulates the development of financial mechanisms that assign economic values to ecosystem services, which also contributes to ecosystem preservation.

Another challenge is enhancing public awareness and concern regarding biodiversity. To meet this challenge, current biodiversity policy increasingly emphasizes functional values of biodiversity rather than expressing the more traditional concern about the conservation status of individual species.

Although not for all CBD targets and issues information could be provided in the present report, including on policy efforts and progress, our overall impression is that at least the various policy efforts in the Netherlands may be regarded as being to a large extent in line with the various actions of the CBD and COP decisions. The remainder of this summary provides an overview of the content of the present report for each chapter separately.

Chapter I: Overview of biodiversity: status, trends and threats

Section 1.1 and 1.2 in this chapter present several key data and data sources regarding the status and trends of Dutch biodiversity. The sources include the Dutch Species Catalogue, a comprehensive online species list of all recorded multi-cellular species in the Netherlands. The database also provides information on the legal and red list status and on recent population trend data for the species concerned. In addition, the chapter presents various sources for spatial data including on nature areas. Further, several trend data provided by the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency are presented.

Finally, section 1.3 provides a concise overview of factors involved in the long-term decline in populations of animal and plant species during the 20th century (see also above).

Chapter II: Current status of national biodiversity strategies and action plans

Section 2.1 in this chapter lists relevant policy plans on biodiversity since 1995 and various corresponding internet links, preferably to English versions. The plans referred to include the most recent document "Biodiversity works: for nature, for people, for ever: the biodiversity policy programme of the Netherlands 2008-2011" and an additional policy note on invasive alien species. Section 2.2 indicates where targets and indicators adopted under the CBD have been incorporated into national policy or legislation. To this end, various articles, thematic programmes and cross-cutting issues of the CBD are listed. For each article, thematic programme and cross-cutting issue, a brief reference is given to where principles according to CBD targets have been addressed and, where appropriate, some corresponding indicators. Section 2.4 refers to a number of sources in

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