

Declaration of the 7th SER European Conference in Avignon 23-27 August 2010

We the participants of the 7th SER Conference recognizing that;

- Significant progress has been made in the EU with respect to the conservation of vital ecosystems. This has resulted in lowering the pace of further degradation – however losses still occur on a scale never observed before,
- Key areas include dune systems, high nature value grasslands, bogs, mires and fens, and coastal systems amongst others
- This is especially true for the Mediterranean area. Despite being one of the 34 global biodiversity hotspots, ecosystem degradation here is very intense resulting in soil erosion, desertification, poor water quality and similar pressures
- At the same time all these systems provide vital services to mankind. These include clean air, clean water, erosion prevention, flood control, carbon storage and more
- The cost of mitigating the negative effects of ecosystem degradation and loss of species is estimated to amount at least several 100s of billions of Euros annually for the EU as a whole

450 participants of the 7th SER Europe conference in Avignon, France, representing scientists, practitioners, nature conservation organizations, businesses and administration officers from 37 countries, after having discussed current problems and challenges of ecological restoration and sustainable development, especially in Europe, came to the following, commonly shared conclusions:

1. Knowledge in ecosystem restoration has grown tremendously over the last decade, through the close relationship between restoration ecology, the discipline, and ecological restoration, the practice. Despite a need to further increase this knowledge in the future it is already now fully operational and capable of finding sustainable solutions for the aforementioned problems;
2. Examples include
 - a. restoring Mediterranean forests for erosion control to reduce huge economic losses in the region;
 - b. restore degraded peatlands for the ecosystem services of vital importance that they provide for society. These include climate change mitigation through CO₂ storage, water retention capacity, and nutrient buffering;
 - c. restore and reconnect degraded floodplains to rivers to act as flood prevention in the case of excessive precipitation;
 - d. restore soil and soil systems, as they are the basis of all terrestrial ecosystems and agro-ecosystems, and must be protected in policy;
 - e. restore the balance of biodiversity in marine and terrestrial ecosystems in favour of native species by adoption of an appropriate invasive species policy.
3. Acknowledge that certain ecosystems are unique, cannot be replaced and need to be protected. Consequently such areas should not be included in mitigation schemes.
4. Address the delays in implementation of Natura 2000 network as a matter of priority.
5. Support for the establishment of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).
6. Restore our “Green Infrastructure” in all aspects of our activities, by enhancing our natural capital, re-instating ecosystem service flows, and enabling biodiversity to flourish; and importantly and essentially integrate green infrastructure into the EU Common Agricultural Policy to strengthen vital ecosystem services such as erosion prevention, pest control and pollination, and into policies pertaining to other sectors. This needs to be properly resourced.
7. We welcome the new EU 2020 and 2050 biodiversity targets as adopted by the European Council in March 2010, which extends beyond conservation and maintenance of biodiversity to restoration of degraded ecosystems and ecosystem services; we strongly support this, and have the tools to implement an effective, efficient and engaging programme. These targets need to be taken into the global arena.