

# ALTER-Net

A Long-Term Biodiversity, Ecosystem and Awareness Research Network

ALTER-Net is a "Network of Excellence" funded by the EU's 6<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme.



## Biodiversity under threat



Biodiversity is important because of its role in the sustainable function of different ecosystems and for the goods and services essential for human survival. But never before has biodiversity been so threatened, particularly through pressures such as land use change, pollution, climate change and invasive species.

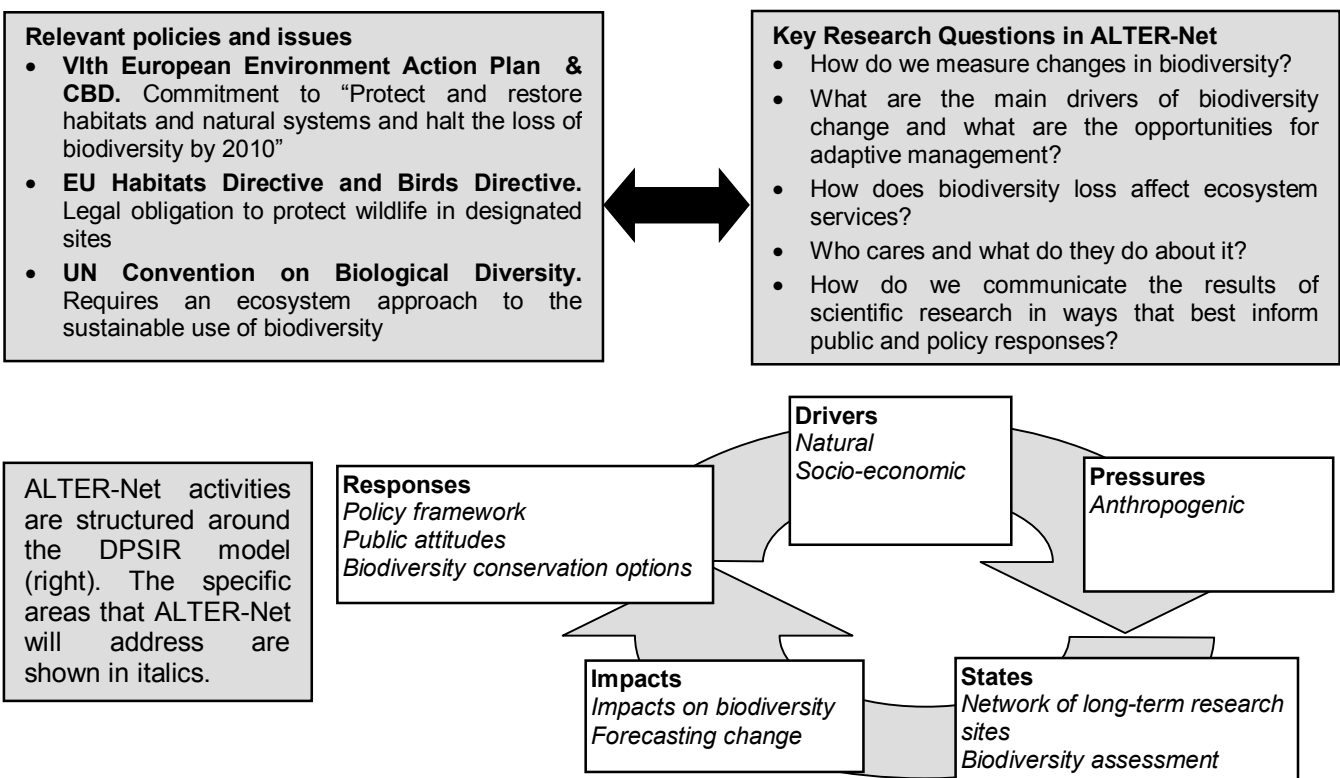
The implementation of policy responses to these threats is, however, seriously hampered by a lack of effective science on both the assessment of biodiversity status and change and its implications for sustainable use. The current European capability in biodiversity and ecosystem research is rich and varied, but it is also dispersed and disconnected and cannot easily be marshalled to deliver the information and knowledge required to address these issues at a European scale.

## What is ALTER-Net?

ALTER-Net is a partnership of 24 organisations from 17 European countries which will develop durable integration of biodiversity research capacity at a European level. Starting in April 2004, the EC is contributing €10 000 000 over the next 5 years to help ALTER-Net:

- Create a network for European long-term terrestrial and fresh-water biodiversity and ecosystem research, based on existing facilities
- Develop approaches to assess and forecast changes in biodiversity, structure, functions and dynamics of ecosystems and their services
- Consider the socio-economic implications and public attitudes to biodiversity loss.

## ALTER-Net: Biodiversity Science for Policy



## Integration objectives

ALTER-Net will, in collaboration with a range of national and international organisations, develop integrated research agendas focussing on priority policy issues. This will be achieved through the:

- Integration of national centres of excellence in biodiversity research and social science;
- Integration of environmental and socio-economic approaches;
- Development of a network of multi-functional long-term ecosystem research platforms (LTER);
- Development of a partnership between research scientists, science communicators and science-based visitor centres;
- Development of a Science-Policy Link to improve information exchange related to biodiversity assessment;
- Development of a framework for a distributed data, information and knowledge management system.

ALTER-Net will also encourage research, management and cultural changes within and between its component organisations through support for training and communication activities to promote the spread of excellence.

## Joint programme of research

The core research programme will cover six research activities:

- **Socio-economic drivers of biodiversity change.** *Purpose:* To identify the relevant socio-economic drivers of biodiversity change, to analyse their social, political and economic dynamics, and to identify policy options to mitigate the negative impacts of these drivers.
- **Biodiversity assessment and change.** *Purpose:* To develop standard methodologies to monitor and analyse trends in biodiversity in terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems, taking into account the different levels (genetic, species etc.) and components of biodiversity (taxonomic and functional) and the services they provide.
- **Impacts of the main natural and anthropogenic drivers and pressures on biodiversity.** *Purpose:* To establish a scientific framework to understand and quantify the integrated impact of natural and anthropogenic drivers and pressures on biodiversity and its relationship to the structure and function of ecosystems
- **Biodiversity conservation options.** *Purpose:* To provide, through inter-disciplinary teams, science based assessments, decision support systems and management tools for the practical implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the European Biodiversity Strategy and associated policies and actions.
- **Public attitudes to biodiversity and its conservation.** *Purpose:* to establish understanding of public attitudes and beliefs concerning biodiversity and its conservation. Related to this is the role of communication mechanisms and processes to engage the public in dialogue with scientists, policy makers and other stakeholders.
- **Forecasting change in biodiversity.** *Purpose:* To develop tools to forecast change in biodiversity. Such tools will be designed to integrate impacts of the main natural and socio-economic drivers and policy objectives and further exploit the ability of models as a unifying tool in interdisciplinary research networks.

## ALTER-Net participants

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UK

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Scientifique, Institut National des Sciences  
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Hydrobiological Institute, Czech Academy of  
Sciences, (HBI CAS), Czech Republic

European Centre for Nature Conservation,  
(ECNC), The Netherlands

Norwegian Institute for Nature Research,  
(NINA), Norway

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