

Invasive alien species: towards an European framework

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Problem

- Invasive alien species (IAS): species intentionally or unintentionally introduced into native ecosystems, with aggressive, invasive behaviour
- Serious threat to biodiversity:
 - May outcompete native species
 - May disseminate new diseases and pests
 - May change ecological conditions and consequently disrupt ecosystem health, resulting in damage or even loss of ecosystem goods and services
- Recognised by EC Communication on biodiversity (2006) as one of the areas which needs to be addressed

Examples: threat to biodiversity

- Killer algae
(*Caulerpa taxifolia*):
 - Introduced inadvertently to Mediterranean Sea from Oceanographic Museum at Monaco
 - Spread over more than 13000ha of seabed, forming dense monocultures and prevent presence of native seaweeds and linked marine life

Examples: threat to biodiversity

- Water hyacinth
(*Eichornia crassipes*):
 - Exclude natives, shades and changes water temperature, oxygen content
- Zebra mussel
(*Dreissena polymorpha*)
 - Out-competes native species
 - Spreading very fast throughout Europe

Examples: threat to biodiversity

- Ruddy duck (*Oxura jamaicensis*) threatening globally endangered white-head duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*) by hybridisation and competition
- Breeding in UK (95%; control programme)
- Wintering in Spain
- IAS do not respect border!



Examples: threat to biodiversity

Plenty of other
examples do exist!



Economic, health, cultural damage

- Economic:

- Killer algae endanger livelihoods of local fishermen
- Water hyacinth blocks waterways, harbours, irrigation systems
- American mink: damage in D estimated 4,2 M EUR
- Zebra mussel: only in Ebro river 2 M EUR/year
- Overall tens or hundreds of millions yearly

- Health:

- Hogweed (*Heracleum spodylium*) toxic, causing serious intoxications of children in contact with skin

- Nature beauty:

- Small balsam (*Impatiens parviflora*) completely replacing multicolour forest bed vegetation in beechforests by uniform dark green

How to tackle it?

- Trade and increased mobility of people are the major pathways for introduction of new alien species
- Very cross-sectoral problem (trade, agriculture, forestry, horticulture, pet industry etc.:
 - many ornamental and pet species involved
 - some species introduced to farming and forestry)

Developing an EU framework

- No unified system to control IAS at present
 - Some categories covered by phytosanitary, veterinary and aquaculture legislation
- Biodiversity Communication (2006) identified IAS as priority action to halt biodiversity loss
- Commission developing an EU strategy
 - first communication foreseen in autumn 2008
 - Participation of stakeholders, MS, public consultation foreseen
 - final strategy planned in 2009-2010

Developing an EU framework

Commission also allocated finances:

- Research projects (6th framework programme):
 - DAISIE (Delivering Alien Invasive Species Inventories for Europe)
 - ALARM (Assesing Large-scale Risks for biodiversity with tested Methods)
- IAS eligible for LIFE+ programme (e.g. eradication projects)

Needs and challenges

- Keep compliance with EU single market and WTO rules when developing a network
- Need for an information and early warning system (priority indicated by 2 stakeholders' consultations this year) allowing to react on time with necessary information and knowledge
- To get public understanding (eradication of « cute » animals and ornamental plants etc.)
- Link to climate change:
 - IAS contributing to the weakening of ecosystem resilience and ability to adapt
 - Distinguishing between IAS and natural spreading as adaptative process

This conference

- Organised thanks to Spain initiative and Slovenian Presidency
- Conference will
 - Bring together key stakeholders and facilitate discussion
 - Bring together European and international experience (CBD, IUCN, USA, Australia, N.Zealand)
 - Contribute to the EU policy development



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EU wide action of IAS will help to
reach our biodiversity targets
Thank you for attention!

