

Third National Report of Belgium to the Convention on Biological Diversity

C. ARTICLES OF THE CONVENTION

Article 8(h) - Alien species

45. Has your country identified alien species introduced into its territory and established a system for tracking the introduction of alien species?	
a) No	
b) Yes, some alien species identified but a tracking system not yet established	
c) Yes, some alien species identified and tracking system in place	X
d) Yes, alien species of major concern identified and tracking system in place	

46.  Has your country assessed the risks posed to ecosystems, habitats or species by the introduction of these alien species?	
a) No	
b) Yes, but only for some alien species of concern (please provide details below)	X
c) Yes, for most alien species (please provide details below)	

Further information on the assessment of the risks posed to ecosystems, habitats or species by the introduction of these alien species.

The project 'Invasive plants in Belgium: patterns, processes and monitoring' (INPLANBEL) performs a multifunctional and multi-scale analysis of alien plant invasion in Belgium. The general aim is to provide a framework for the evaluation of the threat, for the development of policies and management strategy and for the elaboration of further research programmes. This project is the first multidisciplinary approach dealing with invasive plant topics in Belgium (*Fallopia japonica*, *Heracleum mantegazzianum*, *Impatiens glandulifera*, *Impatiens parviflora*, *Prunus serotina*, *Rosa rugosa*, *Senecio inaequidens*, *Solidago gigantea*).

The specific aims of the project are to:

- provide a synthesis on plant invasion in Belgium in the form of a structured list of exotic species;
- identify universally valid principles of biological invasion through a combined analysis of ecophysiological species and community traits;
- provide a detailed analysis of the spreading of a set of invasive species at the landscape level linked to their dispersal capacities;
- analyse the consequences of a set of invasive species on ecosystems.

The project website can be found via www.fsagx.ac.be/ec/inplanbel

Some other research projects:

- Alien crustaceans and molluscs in Belgium, ongoing, 1996-ongoing, RBINS-MUMM.
- Freshwater macrozoobenthos biodiversity and assessment of the biological quality of watercourses in the Walloon Region, 1990-, CRNFB.
- The CRNFB is currently monitoring invasive species in the Walloon watercourses.
- Alien species are identified through inventories of species for some groups (e.g. mosses and liverworts, vascular plants, crustaceans, birds, mammals) in the Walloon Region.
- The Asiatic ground squirrel (*Eutamias sibiricus*) and the coypu (*Myocastor coypus*) are studied in the Flemish Region to investigate the necessity of monitoring. Based on foreign research, the Flemish Region has assessed the risks posed by the muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*) and coypu (*Myocastor coypus*) not only to dikes, crops, and alike, but also to elements of indigenous

ecosystems such as freshwater mussels, fish, amphibians, breeding birds.

- There is a programme in which rare, colonial and introduced breeding bird species are being monitored in the Flemish Region. Among them, alien breeding bird species as the white fronted goose (*Anser erythropus*), the Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*), the barnacle goose (*Branta leucopsis*), the Nile (Egyptian) goose (*Alopochen aegyptiacus*), the mandarin duck (*Aix galericulata*), the ring-necked parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) and the monk parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*) are being monitored. This programme is called the 'Bijzondere Broedvogels Vlaanderen Project' (Flemish Special Breeding Bird Project).
- In the Flemish Region, counts of wintering waterfowl are conducted six times every winter. During these counts, non-native waterfowl species, including IAS, are also counted. The counts are organised by the Institute of Nature Conservation. The international coordination of these counts is in the hands of Wetlands International.
- In the Flemish Region, the Institute of Nature Conservation conducts a research project on the distribution and numbers of Canada geese. This includes holding counts of wintering birds and catching a number of birds to mark them in order to be able to track their movements.
- Through the monitoring and inventory of fish occurring in the Flemish inland waters, alien fish species are also being monitored.
- Invasive bryophytes, their spread in Belgium and impact on the indigenous bryophytes, 1990-2010, NBGB.
- Gathering of data on the current introduction and spread of alien species (e.g. C4-grasses (e.g. *Setaria macrocarpa*, *S. verticilliformis*, *Panicum dichotomiflorum*)), especially in and along maize fields in the area between Ghent and Bruges is being done by the NBGB.
- The alien species issue (invasion mechanism understanding, impact assessment methods, etc.) is part of the research priorities of the Second Plan for a Sustainable Research Programme (2000-2004) of the Federal Office for Scientific, Technical and Cultural Affairs, both on terrestrial ecosystems (one project: 'invasion and biodiversity in grasslands and field borders'; 2000-2005, University of Antwerp) and on marine and freshwater ecosystems (www.belspo.be).
- Taxonomy and ecology of weeds, especially *Polygonum aviculare* (Polygonaceae), 1987, University of Brussels.
- Dispersion of several IAS populations encountered in the Brussels Capital Region is monitored in the framework of a study on the Brussels Capital Region biodiversity.
- In the Brussels Capital Region, special attention is dedicated to exotic species in the monitoring programme on flora and fauna. Several detailed studies have been made on some exotic birds (*Alopochen aegyptiacus*, *Branta canadensis*, *Psittacula krameri*, *Myiopsitta monachus*), exotic herpetofauna species (*Rana ridibunda*), mammals (such as *Eutamias sibericus*). The extension of exotic plant species is also followed with much attention.

The '**Belgian Forum on Invasive Alien Species** (BFIS)' acts as the Belgian node of the IUCN Invasive Species Specialist Group. It aims to provide and gather scientific knowledge about invasive alien species in order to reduce threats to natural ecosystems and to build action plans for preventing or controlling these organisms.

This forum works in close relation with the expert contact groups on alien species depending from the CCIEP nature and biodiversity steering committees, in order to ensure a scientific background to political decisions and to provide an adequate feedback from the international decision-making scene to the scientific community. The steering committees focus on administrative and political aspects in order to prepare Belgian positions for international meetings, to write thematic reports and elaborate programmes related to Belgian international obligations (www.biodiversity.be/bbpf).

47.  Has your country undertaken measures to prevent the introduction of, control or eradicate, those alien species which threaten ecosystems, habitats or species?

a) No	
b) No, but potential measures are under consideration	
c) Yes, some measures are in place (please provide details below)	X
d) Yes, comprehensive measures are in place (please provide details below)	

Further information on the measures to prevent the introduction of, control or eradicate those alien species that threaten ecosystems, habitats or species.

The Regions try to eradicate both the muskrat and coypu (especially in the **Flemish Region** for the coypu), not directly to safeguard indigenous ecosystems but mainly to protect dikes. For this purpose, two international projects were set up to combat the muskrat: one between East- and West-Flanders and Zeeland, another between West-Flanders, the North of France and the **Walloon Region**. A third international project, aimed at the coypu this time, is being set up for the moment involving the Belgian and Dutch provinces of Limburg, and Germany.

Flemish Region: in both public forests and forest reserves, it is prohibited to introduce animals and plants without a permit (Forest Decree). A Decision prohibits the introduction of non-native animal species in the Flemish Region, and is also the legal base for measures to control and eradicate these animal species.

The Flemish Government can take measures to control or prohibit the introduction of animal and plant species or other organisms, as far as these are a threat to nature or the natural environment. Measures can also be taken to control or prohibit the transport of animal species and their carcasses (Decree on nature conservation). A Decision describes what species of fish can be used as fish bait. Only native fish species are allowed.

As of 2005, a programme will be launched to remove floating pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*) from the Flemish watercourses.

Walloon Region: the introduction of non-indigenous species or indigenous species of non-indigenous origin in nature is forbidden except for species used for agriculture and forestry. It is foreseen to integrate the notion of combating invasive alien species in all River Contracts, 'Plans Communaux de Développement de la Nature' and Natural Parcs.

A brochure on *Fallopia japonica*, *Heracleum mantegazzianum*, *Impatiens glandulifera* et *Senecio inaequidens* is available at the Ministry of the Walloon Region. It contains recommendations for the eradication or control of these species.

Brussels Capital Region: it is forbidden to introduce non-indigenous species of birds into the wild. The intentional introduction of non-indigenous species is regulated in order to insure that no damage is caused to natural habitats and indigenous flora and fauna, otherwise the introduction is forbidden.

There is a limited monitoring programme on invasive alien species. For a few species, some control programmes are already in place, to protect valuable ecosystems and protected areas, e.g. control of *Fallopia japonica* and *Heracleum mantegazzianum* in nature reserves. The populations of exotic birds (*Psittacula* sp., Nile goose, Canadian goose, etc.) are intensively followed and preventing management measures are taken (e.g. certain management rules on grassland vegetation which limits the attraction for those birds).

Federal: measures related to importation, exportation and transit of non-indigenous wild bird species are taken (exception made for birds bred in captivity).

North Sea: the Belgian Law of 20.01.1999 on the protection of the marine Environment in marine areas under Belgian jurisdiction (MMM law) forbids the intentional introduction of non-indigenous species in the marine environment without special license (Art. 11, §1). This provision mirrors those included in international instruments like the CBD.

The unintentional introduction of non-indigenous species via ballast water of ships can be prohibited by Royal Decree (Art. 11, §2). But since this is a very specific and rather international issue, the new Belgian framework Law did not specifically address this issue. Belgium therefore takes part in related IMO discussions/instruments (like the one on ballast water).

For the protection of the marine biota, measures can be taken (by Royal Decree and after scientific consultation) for the extermination of non-indigenous nuisance species (Art. 11, §3). The new Law also prohibits the intentional introduction of genetically modified organisms into marine areas (Art. 11, §4).

48.  In dealing with the issue of invasive species, has your country developed, or involved itself in, mechanisms for international cooperation, including the exchange of best practices? (decision V/8)

a) No	
b) Yes, bilateral cooperation	X
c) Yes, regional and/or subregional cooperation	X
d) Yes, multilateral cooperation	

49.  Is your country using the ecosystem approach and precautionary and bio-geographical approaches as appropriate in its work on alien invasive species? (decision V/8)

a) No	X
b) Yes (please provide details below)	

Further comments on the use of the ecosystem approach and precautionary and bio-geographical approaches in work on alien invasive species.

See under question 47.

50. Has your country identified national needs and priorities for the implementation of the Guiding Principles? (decision VI/23)

a) No	X
b) No, but needs and priorities are being identified	
c) Yes, national needs and priorities have been identified (please provide below a list of needs and priorities identified)	

Further comments on the identification of national needs and priorities for the implementation of the Guiding Principles.

National needs and priorities in relation to the Guiding Principles have not been identified for the moment, but the Belgian Forum on Invasive Alien Species will address this issue in the future.

51. Has your country created mechanisms to coordinate national programmes for applying the Guiding Principles? (decision VI/23)

a) No	
b) No, but mechanisms are under development	X
c) Yes, mechanisms are in place (please provide details below)	

Further comments on the mechanisms created to coordinate national programmes for implementing the Guiding Principles.

Although a joined contact group on alien species is acting under the Steering Committees Nature and Biodiversity Convention, there is no effective coordination of national and regional programmes at the moment.

The National Biodiversity Strategy (in preparation) foresees to address the threats IAS pose to the components of biodiversity in Belgium.

52. Has your country reviewed relevant policies, legislation and institutions in the light of the Guiding Principles, and adjusted or developed policies, legislation and institutions? (decision VI/23)

a) No	
b) No, but review under way	X

c) Yes, review completed and adjustment proposed (please provide details below)	
d) Yes, adjustment and development ongoing	
e) Yes, some adjustments and development completed (please provide details below)	
Further information on the review, adjustment or development of policies, legislation and institutions in light of the Guiding Principles.	
Early 2006, a workshop on legislation and policy in relation to IAS is planned. One of the recommendations of this workshop could be to develop a national action plan on IAS taking these Guiding Principles into account.	

53. Is your country enhancing cooperation between various sectors in order to improve prevention, early detection, eradication and/or control of invasive alien species? (decision VI/23)	
a) No	
b) No, but potential coordination mechanisms are under consideration	X
c) Yes, mechanisms are in place (please provide details below)	
Further comments on cooperation between various sectors.	
<p>The Belgian Forum on Invasive Alien Species (BFIS) acts as the Belgian node of the IUCN Invasive Species Specialist Group. It aims to provide and gather scientific knowledge about invasive alien species in order to reduce threats to natural ecosystems and to build action plans for preventing or controlling these organisms. The forum works in close relation with the expert contact groups on alien species depending from the CCIEP nature and biodiversity steering committees, in order to ensure a scientific background to political decisions and to provide an adequate feedback from the international decision-making scene to the scientific community. The forum is open to any people interested by scientific aspects linked to invasive alien species. It gathers about 60 people, mainly from Belgian universities and research centers.</p> <p>In addition to the debates animated on the discussion list, workshops are organised by the forum at regular time intervals. These aim at improving the Belgian expertise in specific fields through scientific communications and roundtable discussions gathering the different stakeholders concerned by biological invasions.</p> <p>Action 18 of the 2nd FPSD is devoted to biodiversity and focuses on sectoral integration of biodiversity in Federal key sectors (transport, economy, development cooperation, scientific policy). One of the proposed actions for the integration of biodiversity considerations into the transport sector is the development of a national warning system for IAS.</p>	

54. Is your country collaborating with trading partners and neighboring countries to address threats of invasive alien species to biodiversity in ecosystems that cross international boundaries? (decision VI/23)	
a) No	
b) Yes, relevant collaborative programmes are under development	X
c) Yes, relevant programmes are in place (please specify below the measures taken for this purpose)	X
Further comments on collaboration with trading partners and neighboring countries.	
Some collaborations have been developed with neighbouring countries on a number of species, but not with more distant trading partners.	

The Regions try to eradicate both the muskrat and coypu (especially in the **Flemish Region** for the coypu), not directly to safeguard indigenous ecosystems but mainly to protect dikes. For this purpose, two international projects were set up to combat the muskrat: one between East- and West-Flanders and Zeeland, another between West-Flanders, the North of France and the **Walloon Region** (muskrat control, infestation norms definition, internet publication of results for exchange of information purpose). A third international project, aimed at the coypu this time, is being set up for the moment involving the Belgian and Dutch provinces of Limburg, and Germany.

55. Is your country developing capacity to use risk assessment to address threats of invasive alien species to biodiversity and incorporate such methodologies in environmental impact assessment (EIA) and strategic environmental assessment (SEA)? (decision VI/23)

a) No	
b) No, but programmes for this purpose are under development	X
c) Yes, some activities for developing capacity in this field are being undertaken (please provide details below)	
d) Yes, comprehensive activities are being undertaken (please provide details below)	

Further information on capacity development to address threats of invasive alien species.

It is foreseen in the proximity of Natura 2000 areas.

56. Has your country developed financial measures and other policies and tools to promote activities to reduce the threats of invasive species? (decision VI/23)

a) No	
b) No, but relevant measures and policies are under development	
c) Yes, some measures, policies and tools are in place (please provide details below)	X
d) Yes, comprehensive measures and tools are in place (please provide details below)	

Further comments on the development of financial measures and other policies and tools for the promotion of activities to reduce the threats of invasive species.

In the **Flemish** and **Walloon Regions**, subsidies are delivered to land owners and local authorities for using endemic scrub and tree species instead of exotic ones in re-afforestation projects. Removal of exotic tree species, especially *Prunus*, is carried out using several methods together: manual removal for younger stands or machinal for the older trees, grazing programmes to maintain 'cleared' areas.

The **Brussels Capital Region** has so far not developed specific financial measures to reduce threats of invasive species. However, financial efforts have already been made to develop a policy of information, sensibilisation and education: publication of several brochures for the public.

Box XLVI.

Please elaborate below on the implementation of this article and associated decisions specifically focusing on:

- outcomes and impacts of actions taken;
- contribution to the achievement of the goals of the Strategic Plan of the Convention;
- contribution to progress towards the 2010 target;

- d) progress in implementing national biodiversity strategies and action plans;
- e) contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;
- f) constraints encountered in implementation.