



**Tartu Declaration**  
**on the effective implementation**  
**of the EU Nature Restoration Law:**  
**MAKE IT HAPPEN!**

30 August 2024



26-30.08  
2024  
TARTU  
ESTONIA

SERE24

14<sup>TH</sup> EUROPEAN  
CONFERENCE ON  
ECOLOGICAL  
RESTORATION

[info@sere2024.org](mailto:info@sere2024.org)

14th European Conference on Ecological Restoration  
**Bridging Science, Practice, and  
Policy of Nature Restoration**

26-30 AUGUST  
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ESTONIA  
TARTU

European Capital of Culture 2024

On 18 August 2024, the EU Nature Restoration Law (NRL) came into force. The scientific and wider professional community assembled on the occasion of the 14<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Ecological Restoration<sup>1</sup> in Tartu (Estonia) to discuss the science, policy, and practice that will be at the heart of the implementation of the NRL. The participants of the conference are grateful to everyone who contributed to the final adoption of the law.

Nearing the halfway point of the UN Decade of Restoration 2021-2030, the law inspires the global community and provides hope for the sustainable health and well-being of future generations within planetary boundaries. The law not only rightly addresses the need for nature restoration in terrestrial and marine protected areas, but also outside them in agricultural, urban, aquatic and forestry landscapes. Despite the significant weakening of certain provisions in the law's final version, adequate implementation will be a game changer for the future of European nature and the well-being of its citizens, including all nature-based solutions for climate change adaptation and mitigation. Nature restoration must be elevated in our broader culture as part of our future heritage, and connect to all.

Yet, multiple practical bottlenecks still have to be tackled before our ecosystems are restored to sustainable good condition in terms of quality and quantity and the well-being of future generations is secured in our urban and rural landscapes. The Nature Restoration Law offers multiple opportunities and its success will largely depend on the ambition in the design and implementation of the National Restoration Plans.

Effective restoration must be based on agreed standards and result in sustainable net gains for biodiversity, ecosystem services and human well-being.

Thus, for an effective and timely implementation of the NRL, we have adopted the following recommendations:

## 1. Action must start now

Restoration is needed to effectively counteract the effects of the climate and biodiversity crises on nature and people. There is no need to wait for the National Restoration Plans to be finalised before starting the restoration investments needed for 2030. Sufficient scientific knowledge is already available to **begin the work on all ecosystems** in urban, rural, marine and freshwater environments.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sere2024.org/>

## 2. Ensure sufficient and coherent long-term financing

The current ecological challenges are huge and urgent, and therefore need massive long-term financial support, knowing that every invested Euro will be paid back multiple times<sup>2</sup>. Financial planning by the Member States needs to be as efficient and transparent as possible, with substantial financial support from the EU. **Thus, a specific EU fund for biodiversity protection and restoration, strengthening the existing LIFE fund, is needed to support the Member States with a sustainable positive perspective regarding restoration ambition.** At the same time, subsidies that cause biodiversity losses need to be eliminated, as agreed upon in target 18 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Activities and outcomes harming nature and biodiversity need to be taxed efficiently.

The costs to implement the EU Nature Restoration Law have been estimated by the Commission at 6.0–8.2 € billion annually. The EU Biodiversity Strategy proposes to unlock 20 € billion per year. A 2022 report by IEEP and Trinomics<sup>3</sup> found that an extra 22 € billion per year is needed in addition to current spending. **It is highly worrying that the financing needs at the EU level for implementing the NRL are not yet secured, while CAP funds or at least sub-programmes still contribute to biodiversity loss and the climate crisis.**

Additional EU support and resources may be needed for Member States that lack sufficient staffing or knowledge of the condition of their ecosystems.

Financing should be secured for the whole duration of the projects, which must include evaluation, maintenance and monitoring (e.g., after-LIFE applicable to all funded projects). This must be addressed promptly when designing funding instruments for ER projects under the NRL.

The attraction of private capital to restoration is essential to reach the levels of financing needed to meet the challenges of restoration. Businesses and the financial sector can play a major role in the collective restoration effort through their participation and contribution to voluntary frameworks and other funding of restoration actions on the ground. National Nature Restoration Plans should be considered as investment plans for the future and guarantees to control climate change-related risks.

## 3. Ensure nature-positive and inclusive information sharing and engagement of all relevant stakeholders

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<sup>2</sup> The EC impact assessment studies for the Regulation mention a return on investment in economic value of a factor 8 to 38 in the form of e.g. reduced floods, droughts, wildfires, health risks and avoided costs by adopting nature-based solutions.

<sup>3</sup> <https://ieep.eu/publications/biodiversity-tracking-in-the-eu-budget-and-financing-the-eu-biodiversity-strategy-2030/>

**Effective communication strategies** are an essential priority at both EU, national and project levels to mainstream the importance of nature restoration as a cost-effective solution to many of society's challenges, including climate change, disaster risk prevention, human health and water and food security. The policy negotiations that led to the approval of the NRL, showed the need to raise societal awareness about the importance of ecological restoration for our common wellbeing. Misconceptions and misinformation widely circulated, despite attempts by the scientific community to share objective scientific evidence and provide fact-checks.

Nature is important to us all and therefore must be inclusive to society. Citizens need to be informed and involved in the planning process of nature restoration and in celebrating future successes. Restoration programs will be highly facilitated if they integrate bottom-up approaches, with the help of communication, social and legal experts. **Best practice guidance for conflict management and stakeholder participation at the national and local levels needs to be made commonly and freely available. Nature is part of our culture everywhere. Culture is the best bridge of all, encompassing education, science and art. A Nature Restoration acculturation must therefore be promoted. It is key that the shifting baselines for nature quality often perceived by European citizens can be improved to a higher nature quality ambition.**

Upscaling of nature restoration is not possible without a transformative change in our economy and attitude towards the biodiversity and climate crisis. **Socio-economic experts should contribute by uncovering unsustainable practices through life cycle analyses, by developing alternative socioeconomic and business models and by estimating the costs and benefits of restoration.** Circular economy thinking for nature, health and well-being needs to be promoted and practised at all scales. Local engagement and ambassadors are crucial to mainstream transformative change. **Documentation of the benefits of restoration measures in different ecosystems, be it at a local or aggregated at the national scale is essential to facilitate the implementation of the NRL. Engaging law and jurisprudence experts is also essential to help disentangle legally binding procedures and ensure effective implementation of the NRL.**

#### 4. Ensure ambitious National Restoration Plans and their implementation based on scientific evidence and best-practice approaches

All the implementation stages of the NRL require being based on all the sciences relevant to restoration (not just restoration ecology and the natural sciences, but also social, legal,

economic and health sciences). **It is therefore highly recommended that planning and implementation are done in a joint collaborative effort between policymakers, scientists and practitioners through the establishment of ‘national knowledge network hubs’ where information is shared, knowledge gaps detected, and implementation monitored and evaluated (see Fig. 1). In addition, the national restoration planning and implementation should be harmonised with other sectoral policies (such as water, soil, air, climate, agriculture, fisheries, forestry, energy, spatial planning, urban planning, and mineral extraction).**

**At the EU level, the Biodiversa+ initiative for a European knowledge hub on nature restoration<sup>4</sup> is very promising for supporting the goals of the NRL and its future operation needs to be financially secured.** It will enable the continuous exchange of knowledge on restoration methods and be an invaluable source of information for all players at the MS level. Ideally, the knowledge hub provides validated user-friendly tools for different regions and ecosystem types. Guidelines for ecosystem restoration should be barrier-informed, mentioning useful indicators and thresholds. More guidance is needed on the trade-offs and synergies between biodiversity and climate, as well as concerning soil, water, air, economic benefits, and human health.

**To reach a good condition of our ecosystems and also comply with the non-deterioration obligation of the NRL it is imperative that restoration planning follows a landscape/seascape approach.** Proper assessment of all environmental pressures, including climate change, is important to define measures for halting ecological degradation. The functioning of (meta-)populations of target species and their interaction with different ecosystems in the landscape is essential information for defining measures to improve connectivity and habitat quality. Well-connected habitat networks within and between protected areas are essential for restoring and maintaining genetically diverse populations, which enables species to respond to climate change and other environmental perturbations.

This landscape approach is also essential to underpin the favourable reference area for ecosystems (as defined in the NRL) and the building of a sustainable and coherent network of protected areas (30-10% target of the EU Biodiversity Strategy<sup>5</sup>) that can provide legal certainty to other land users and sectors.

**To make National Restoration Plans effective and realistic, the projects should increase efforts to support reliable native seed networks at the national level.** Those networks should provide native seeds in quality and quantity, relying on certification standards for

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.biodiversa.eu/engagement/biodivrestore-knowledge-hub/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://dopa.jrc.ec.europa.eu/kcbd/actions-tracker/#COHERENT%20NETWORK%20OF%20PROTECTED%20AREAS>

ecological restoration as the European Native Seed Producers Association(ENSPA)'s Code of Conduct.

**The National Restoration Plans should be concrete and transparent, underpinned with geodata and measurable targets that allow for evaluation based on scientific evidence or best-practice approaches and meet the provisions of the NRL.** National Restoration Plans should be living documents with different building blocks, where data and information are added as they become available or knowledge proceeds. Besides the quantity, also the ecological quality of urban ecosystems should be included.

Finally, **restoration projects should align with ‘standards of practice’<sup>6</sup>**: standards and certification systems are essential tools to demonstrate quality and accountability.

## 5. Ensure long-term monitoring, reporting and law enforcement

**Member States must carry out preparatory monitoring and research to identify and evaluate restoration measures at the site level.** Ecosystem mapping and understanding of ecosystem and landscape/seascape functioning is essential to deliver high-quality National Restoration Plans and cost-effective implementation. Evaluation and reporting at the site level on the non-deterioration obligation will benefit from the availability of clear targets, threshold values and indicators for the good condition of ecosystems. Citizen science can complement professional monitoring for the evaluation of species diversity and long-term trends. Monitoring data and condition assessments must be publicly available, especially for site managers.

Finally, law enforcement at both the national and EU level will be key to making the Nature Restoration Law a success.

This declaration was endorsed by the 674 participants from 47 countries present at the SERE2024 Conference in Tartu, European Capital of Culture 2024.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/publications/standards-practice-guide-ecosystem-restoration-summary-report>

## What we need: National Knowledge Network hubs

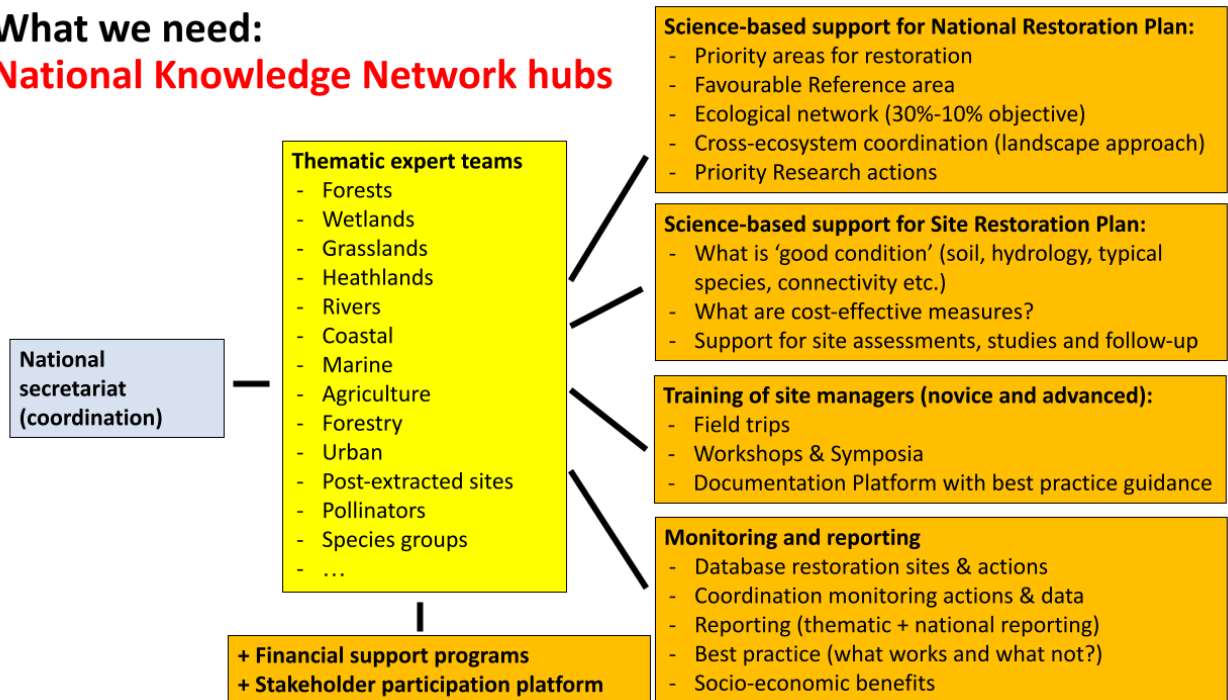


Fig. 1. We urge Member States to install 'national knowledge network hubs' (or similar) where the expertise on ecosystem condition and the necessary restoration measures at site level and their outcomes can be exchanged between scientists, site managers and policymakers in an inter- and transdisciplinary way. Some major challenges of the NRL are indicated in the orange boxes. Expert teams can be appointed based on ecosystem types, landscape/seascape types or regions, or any other structure as Member States see fit. The functioning of the national hub will benefit from coordination with the 'EU restoration knowledge hub' of Biodiversa+ and vice-versa. Structural collaboration between scientists, site managers and policymakers is essential for all phases of the implementation of the NRL.