

Considering that :

- The Convention on Biological Diversity recognises invasive alien species as a major threat to biodiversity and economic welfare and strongly recommends to contracting Parties to prevent their introduction and mitigate their impact on environment (VI/23);
- The Bern Convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats has developed an 'European Strategy on Invasive Alien Species' that offers advice to the contracting Parties on measures to combat biological invasions and recommend them to draw up and implement national strategies;
- European environment ministers commit themselves to implement their respective biodiversity strategies and action plans by 2008 by at least half of the countries through the Kiev resolution on Biodiversity;

The members of the Belgian Forum on Invasive Species agree that :

1. Many thousands of non-native terrestrial, freshwater and marine organisms have been deliberately introduced or unintentionally brought to Belgium;
2. Many non-native organisms have established themselves, and a few of them have become problematic invasives;
3. Problematic invasive organisms modify native populations, communities and ecosystems, may make it difficult to conserve native ecosystems, may interfere with human activities and uses of land, freshwater or marine resources, and may provoke health problems;
4. The financial cost of problematic biological invasions is often high, originating both from direct economic damage and from the cost of control activities;
5. Efforts to control problematic invasive organisms are typically difficult, costly and not always successful;
6. The most cost-effective method of combating problematic invasion is prevention, and failing that, intervention early in the establishment and range extension of the organism; this requires the capacity to predict future invaders among exotics, which is currently still problematic;
7. Many international agreements point out the importance of the fight against problematic invasive organisms, and there is a considerable body of knowledge and experience concerning invasions;
8. The factors favouring an invasion are often regional or global, although the most acute impact of problematic invasions may be felt locally rather than nationally or internationally;
9. The increase in movement of people and goods will increase the number and frequency of introductions of potentially invasive organisms, thereby increasing the probability of establishment and subsequent economic and ecological impacts;
10. Problematic invasive organisms can only be controlled effectively and efficiently if action is based on a comprehensive knowledge of the ecology of the organism and the ecosystem or biotope concerned.

The members of the Belgian Forum on Invasive Species recommend to build up a national strategy on invasive species in order to limit the ecological and economic impact of invasive non-native species in Belgium; it should be based on the following **key recommendations** :

1. *Responsibility for non-native species issues* – The Belgian Federal Government should designate or create a single lead structure to undertake the role of co-ordinating and ensuring consistency of application of non-native species policies. This structure has to strengthen and link existing policies and expertise in relevant fields as phytosanitary controls, animal health and welfare, trade in non-native species, biosecurity initiatives, etc.
2. *Prevention measures* – Any intentional introduction of non-native species in the wild should be subject to comprehensive and widely accepted risk assessment procedures in order to identify potential problem species for biodiversity, economy and human health.
3. *Action plans and codes of conducts* – Action plans should be developed to help prevent intentional and unintentional introductions for all relevant sectors in a participative fashion involving the main stakeholders; they should be developed to address the main introduction pathways (e.g. ballast water, fisheries, food products, packing material, biological control, horticulture and pets).
4. *Legislation* – The existing legislation has to be revised, enlarged and updated to improve handling of invasive non-native species issues. It has to develop a statutory basis for the actions plans set out in previous recommendation and to take in consideration trade, introduction and eradication of non-native species, especially those that have the greatest potential impact on biodiversity, economy and public health ('black list').
5. *Detection and capacity for mitigation action* – Policies should be established with respect to early detection and control of detrimental non-native species in the wild. Adequate monitoring for non-native species at points of entry and in the wild has to be developed on the basis of the existing schemes under the responsibility of the regions (e.g. Habitat and Water Framework Directives). Moreover, policies, operational capacity and best practices should be developed with respect to control or eradication of black-listed species.
6. *Scientific capacity* – Although invasion biology is an expanding field in ecology worldwide, it has only recently begun to gain momentum in Belgium. Building up and maintaining scientific capacity is a prerequisite to success in the aforementioned fields, and scientists should be involved in the development of a national strategy.
7. *Raising awareness* – A targeted awareness strategy involving all relevant sectors has to be developed to ensure a good understanding of invasive species issues including introduction pathways, economic and ecological impacts, etc. This approach should help to increase the public acceptance of measures taken to address existing problems as eradication programmes or trade regulation.