

# STRATEGIC

# PLAN



BELGIAN BIODIVERSITY PLATFORM

2017-2021



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# 1. Background

The Belgian Biodiversity Platform (below referred to as 'Platform') is a science-policy interface funded by the Belgian Science Policy (BelSPO), and supported by a Cooperation Agreement between federal and relevant federated authorities.

In cooperation with these authorities, it acts as a neutral interface of policy- and society-relevant, comprehensive and scientifically sound information on all aspects of biodiversity science.

In 2009 the Belgian federal government endorsed the Belgian Biodiversity Platform as a credible, relevant and legitimate science-policy instrument by transforming it into a long-term initiative with recurrent budget, depending on a four-year evaluation by international experts. The first such evaluation took place in October 2012, the second ended mid-May 2016.

Both evaluations confirmed that the Belgian Biodiversity Platform (BBPF) performs its role in an outstanding way, not only "bridging between science and policy" but also "bringing

on new issues and problems that might need further research, playing an important role in connecting the different levels of governance in Belgium, facilitating the integration of joint positions, enabling joint learning processes and finding synergies in workflows".

It also confirmed that the work performed by the BBPF is "of very high quality, and that the implemented mechanisms allow for upscaling and could be very well suited for use in broader contexts, new policy areas and by new groups" and that it acts as "an important catalyst to the development and support of new initiatives related to national and international biodiversity research".

In addition, the external evaluation also proposed avenues to improve the Platform. These can be summarized along four major lines:

To continue efforts to increase communication; harmonize efforts across communities, regions, portfolios and data providers; and detect emerging issues on the horizon.

3

To further strengthen priority setting and proper documentation of achievements

2

To develop further actions to help mainstreaming biodiversity considerations amongst sectors and policies, integrating new developments and linking up with new agendas (2020 Sustainable Development Agenda; Paris Climate Agreement).

4

To reinforce the creation of a management and employment situation that maintains a flexible, collaborative Platform team with a broad set of tasks (even when the basic conditions may need to be changed), and with sufficient eye for long-term stability (i.e. including the development of phase-out strategies for specific Platform activities, see further) and interaction with the Platform's Steering Committee.

To answer to these proposals, and to synchronize the evolution of the Platform's strategy with the evaluation cycle, we present a revised and updated strategic plan for the period 2017-2021. Besides the official evaluation report, we also used recommendations from several ad-hoc meetings with our target audiences (Steering Committee meetings; Community of Practice information sessions; User evaluation surveys; Platform Concept Notes).

# 2. Context and working modalities

## 2.1. Federal and regional competences on biodiversity and science matters

Biodiversity relates to several policy fields (environment protection, nature conservation, marine and terrestrial environments, international relations incl. development cooperation, education, trade and transport, health, agriculture and fisheries, and research – a non-exhaustive list). In the Belgian context, competences related to these policy fields are divided or shared between the federal, regional, and community governments. Being an initiative that is based on a Cooperation Agreement between the Belgian Federal State and federated entities, the Platform can work directly on subjects related to the competences of the State and can engage in fields related to competences of the regions and communities (e.g., nature conservation, large part of research).

Consequently, the core task of the Platform is the development, promotion and reinforcement on national, European and international

level of:

- Biodiversity research with societal relevance
- Biodiversity e-infrastructures
- Interfaces between science and policy in the context of biodiversity and ecosystem services

## 2.2. Workforce and distributed nature of the Platform

To function within this context, the Platform has at its disposal a distributed team of biodiversity experts, and a support team of IT experts and a communications coordinator, under the management of a BelSPO executive secretary. In correspondence with the Cooperation Agreement, the Platform's biodiversity experts are physically distributed over two Regional and one Federal scientific host institutes.

The scientific host institutions are strategically chosen for their capacity to offer the most appropriate working environment for the Platform to fulfil its mandate and the activities set out in the Platform's Strategic Plan as approved by the Steering Committee. They do that by fostering

partnership with own expertise by enabling the Platform to extend their network to key partners belonging to different levels of governance by giving the Platform a direct access to key data-sets and information.

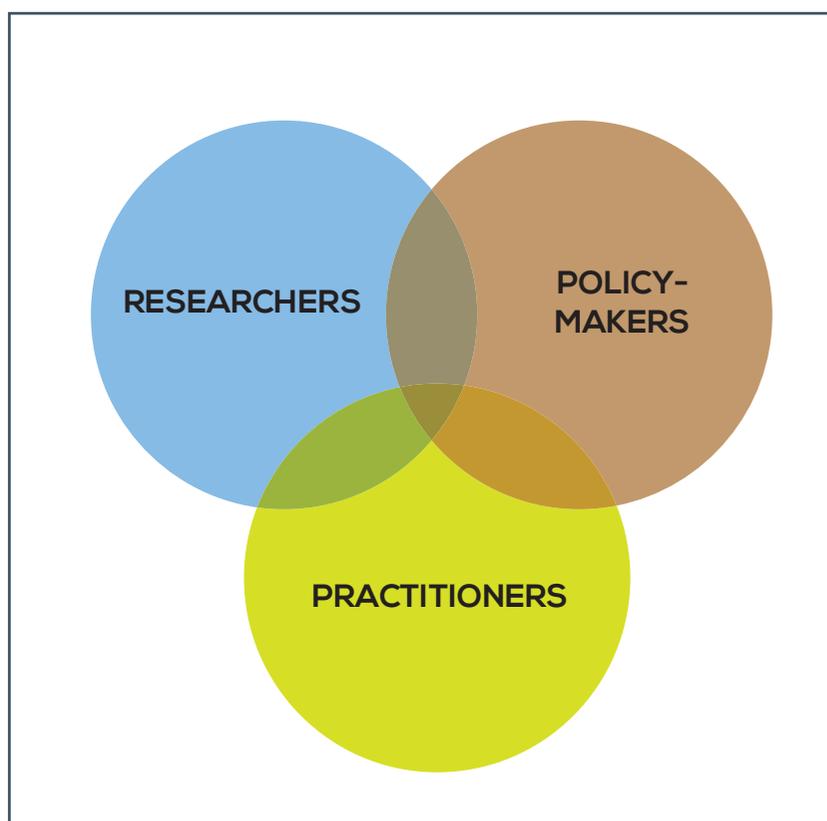
### 2.3. Target audiences

The core business of the Platform is to support the Belgian scientific community, and act as a science-policy interface and catalyst in biodiversity science. It feeds scientific information into policy processes and conveys feedback from political processes to scientists. Working within this context, the Platform's science-policy activities focus on (but are not necessarily restricted to) biodiversity-related research of societal and policy relevance, and involve scientific experts, policy makers, practitioners and stakeholders at the decision-making level

as its primary target audience; other actors (e.g. citizens) are involved as appropriate following specific initiatives or subjects.

### 2.4. New initiatives and external funding projects

In order to successfully fulfil its functions and operational objectives, the Platform will need to maintain its forward-looking attitude towards the identification of new and emerging issues and initiatives in biodiversity research, and to



BBPF main target audiences

# 2. Context and working modalities

respond to upcoming challenges and opportunities. The Platform therefore proposes a workflow that enables a flexible response to challenges and opportunities, as also requested by the evaluators.

The workflow contains the following steps:

- Using the Platform's extensive network of partners, topical issues or initiatives in biodiversity science and policy are identified in an early stage, and their relevance to the Belgian scientific community and stakeholders is assessed. The issues may be diverse, and can concern scientific problems or international initiatives, be either policy and society driven (top down) or emanating from the demand of researchers (bottom-up), or be related to research or funding needs. The Communities of Practice of the Platform are fundamental for this as arenas for interaction between researchers, managers, and decision makers.
- Any possible new issue or initiative will be introduced to the Platform's

monthly coordination meetings who will discuss its concordance with the mission of the Platform, and decide whether follow-up is appropriate. For this assessment, a clear set of criteria will be used:

- Clarity: new initiatives need to be clear and the result of transparent, participatory decision-making.
- Diversity: new initiatives need to include a range of relevant expertise and interests.
- Anticipation: new initiatives need to be connected with horizon scanning exercises that anticipate science, technology, policy and societal developments.
- Capacity building: new initiatives should help policy makers to better understand science and scientists to better understand policy makers, building capacities for further science-policy interfacing work.
- Relevant outputs: new initiatives need to be timely in respect to policy needs, accessible, comprehensive;

efficient dissemination. They should also strive to convey messages across different domains and individuals, and to make the messages relevant for various audiences.

- Interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity: new initiatives need to facilitate collaborations between scientific disciplines and types of expertise, as well as dialogue between different types of stakeholders. In particular, the role of scientific and extra-scientific stakeholders as communicators, ‘translators’ or ‘brokers’ of existing knowledge should be better acknowledged and mobilized.
- Adaptability and reflexivity: Responsiveness to changing contexts; flexibility to change. Allowing for critical assessment of scientific outputs in light of users needs and other knowledges.

- Once an issue or initiative is identified as being of potential topical importance and relevant

within the framework of the Platform’s mission the Platform establishes an action plan in response to the specific nature of the issue.

- The Platform identifies the required resources to implement the proposed actions and the possible source(s) for the action, including, if relevant, cooperation with federal or regional partners.
- Where needed, a phase-out strategy will be built in. Phase-out strategies can be particularly relevant with regard to our ‘Communities of Practice’ (CoP), i.e. networks of experts (scientists, policy makers, practitioners and other stakeholders) focusing on topical issues (see further). Experience has shown that the activity span of CoPs is variable: it can be a permanent structure, but can also range from one to several years depending on the issue and interest of the community. The establishment of a new CoP but also the temporary reduction or cessation of the activity of the CoP are possible.

# 2. Context and working modalities

Building more capacity in various CoPs to have them eventually taking over the respective functions of the Platform will ensure sustainability of the various communities while the Platform will still be able to pick up new topics. A 'Best Practices Guide for CoPs' based on a comparison of the different CoPs (see task 1.5, i.e. listing what works in all CoPs, what is unique to them, how can you learn from each other in the organization of the CoP etc.) could help to make CoPs more sustainable, and to develop a phase-out strategy within the Platform itself.

- The final report is presented to the Platform's Steering Committee for adoption.
- The responsibility for each new Platform core action or initiative will be assigned to one Platform member. This person will, with the support of additional Platform personnel as needed, and in consultation with appropriate partners, follow-up and report on the action or initiative to the accountable Platform coordination body.

Whereas the Platform has the mandate to analyse and report on the effectiveness of Belgian biodiversity research, it does not perform biodiversity research itself. However, the Platform can still engage in externally funded projects in support of science and/or policy, or in research projects focusing on science-policy interfacing matters. Such externally funded projects must:

- (1) largely rely on their own means and resources for their implementation;
- (2) have a formal link with the Platform through the designation of a Platform expert as accountable for the implementation of the project or part thereof; and
- (3) have objectives that clearly and indisputably align with the Platform's strategic and operational goals, and its mandate.

Proposals for new externally funded projects must be presented to the Platform's Steering Committee through the workflow outlined above.

Yet, here the promotor of the project or relevant project work packages retains the ultimate accountability for the project.

Externally funded projects of particular relevance to the Platform mission may eventually be incorporated as core activity, depending on the evaluation and agreement of the Platform's Steering Committee.

### **2.5. Evaluation and follow-up of activities or projects**

- Continuous follow-up of all initiatives is performed through the Platform's monthly coordination

meetings, and the implementation of Key Performance Indicators (KPI).

- The Platform's Steering Committee is informed about on-going developments through the Platform's annual report and KPI report (or punctually as the need arises), and guides the Platform in its choice of activities and priorities.
- Depending on the evaluation outcomes, activities are adjusted, reinforced, diversified or discontinued if objectives are not met.

# 3. Vision and core mission of the Platform

Our vision:

***"Belgium as a champion for collaborative, science-based policy-making on biodiversity"***

For this vision to become a reality, many stakeholders are needed to work hand-in-hand, from governments to scientists, businesses, citizens, practitioners and many more. The Platform focuses mainly on scientists and policy-makers, though our strategic partners are not restricted to these two communities. Indeed, science-policy interfacing (SPI) activities encompass not only traditional collaborations between scientists and policymakers, but also broader exchanges between knowledge holders and people involved in governance and decision-making, at different levels.

The core mission of the Platform is twofold:

***We serve as a facilitator between biodiversity researchers, policy and practice***

***We act as a catalysor to improve the scientific process through innovative approaches (open science, open data, transdisciplinarity, stakeholder involvement)***

Science-Policy interfaces can be defined as 'social processes which encompass relations between scientists and other actors in the policy process, and which allow for exchanges, co-evolution, and joint construction of knowledge with the aim of enriching decision-making'. It is with this concept in mind that the Platform acts on the Belgian scene. To do so, the Platform follows four strategic objectives.



# BELGIAN BIODIVERSITY PLATFORM

## FOR SCIENCE, POLICY, AND PRACTICE

**OUR VISION**  
Belgium is a champion for collaborative science-based policy-making on biodiversity.

### MISSION STATEMENT

- ◆ We act as a catalyser to improve the scientific process through innovative approaches (open science, open data, transdisciplinarity, stakeholders involvement...)
- ◆ We serve as a facilitator between biodiversity researchers, policy and practice.

### INVOLVEMENT

We conduct activities in Belgium, Europe, and globally.



### OUR PRINCIPLES

TRANSDISCIPLINARITY



OPEN DATA



NURTURING TRUST



SUSTAINABILITY



CAPACITY BUILDING



HOLISTIC APPROACH



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

**OBJECTIVE 1**  
ANSWERING POLICY NEEDS

Activities with a policy-driven focus

**OBJECTIVE 2**  
CATALYSING THE IMPROVEMENT OF RESEARCH PROCESSES

Activities with a research-driven focus

**OBJECTIVE 3**  
KNOWLEDGE INTERFACING AND SHARING

Activities establishing a direct dialogue between scientists, decision-makers and practitioners

**OBJECTIVE 4**  
ENABLING DATA PUBLICATION AND DATA USE

(Transversal)

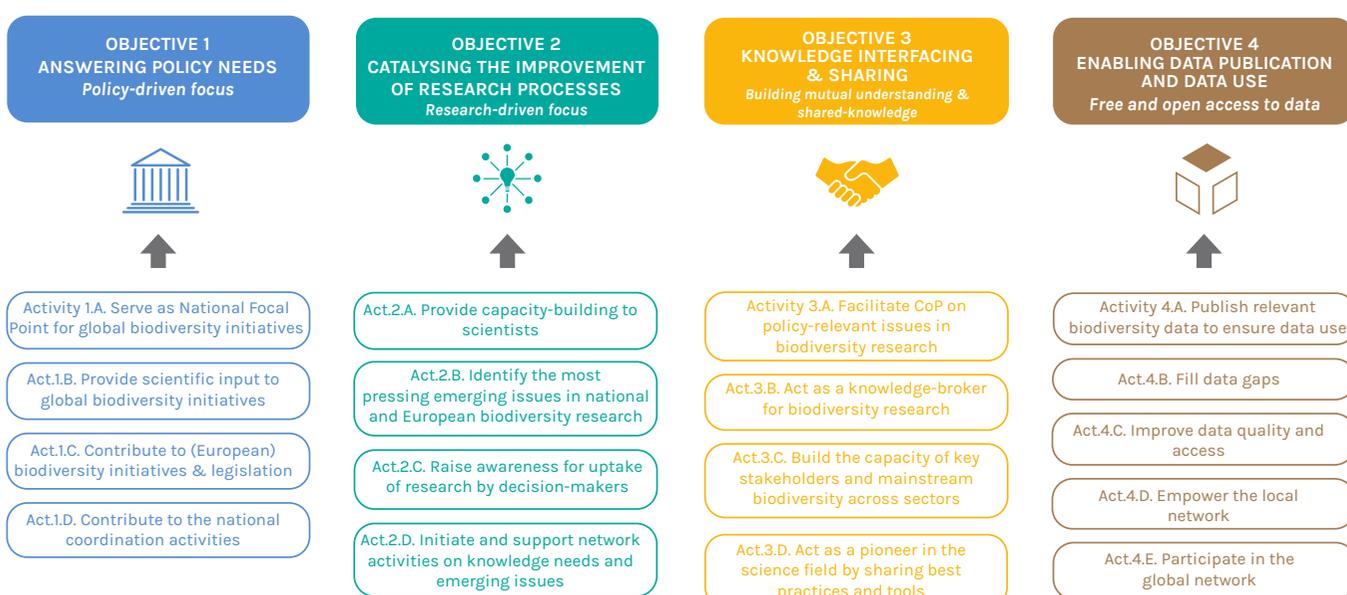
Activities and tools supporting research and SPI through the promotion of free and open access to biodiversity data

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# 4. Strategic objectives of the Platform

The work of the Platform is centered on four complementary objectives described below. These objectives specifically focus, but are not restricted to, scientists, policy makers and other stakeholders in Belgium. The Platform mainly focuses on a professional public which is interested in credible information. Hence, quality and relevance rather than quantity and general information with regards to the four objectives below are the communication lines of the Platform. These four objectives are supported by information technologies (IT),

and communication services (see 5.3.). It needs to be noted that they are not distinctly separated, but instead are highly intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Especially the objective of data publication and data use should be viewed as largely transversal, and supporting the other Platform objectives.



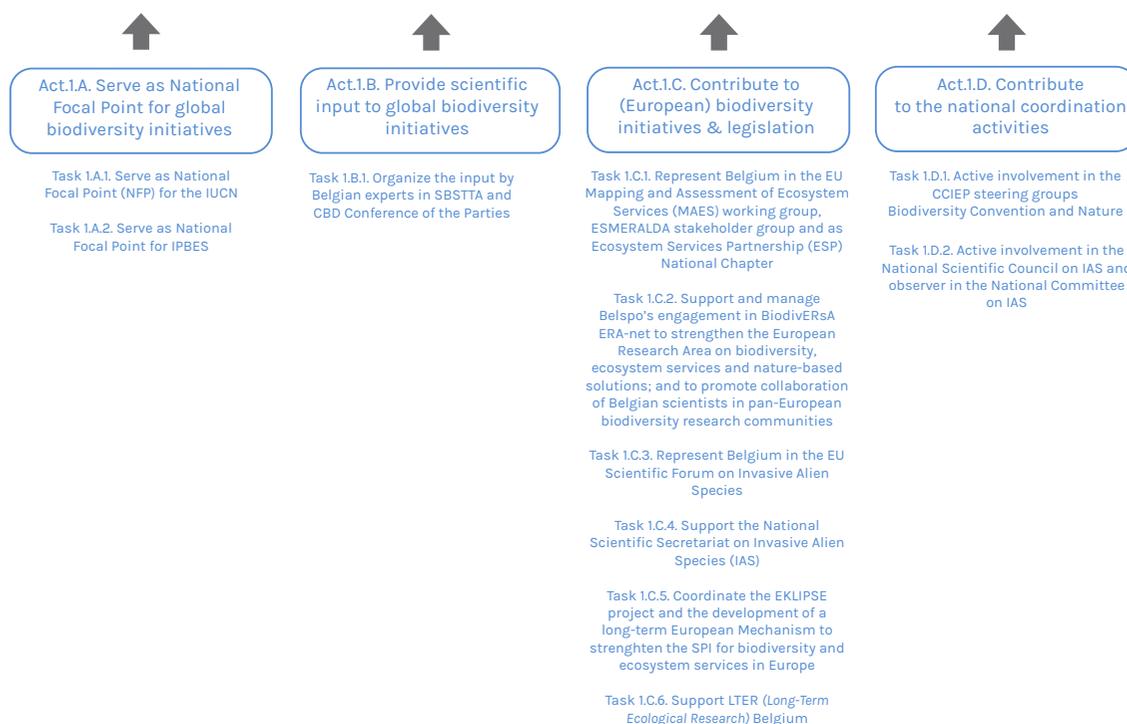
## OBJECTIVE 1 - ANSWERING POLICY NEEDS: Activities with a policy-driven focus

In the field of biodiversity, the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) concept has become increasingly visible both at the scientific and policy level. Some SPI have a more policy-driven focus, whereby policy-makers set the agenda on the research needed to answer societal issues. In this set-up, decision-makers play a proactive role in requesting information from the scientific community in

order to make their decision. In this kind of SPI, scientific information must be relevant to policy requests from various sectors and must also be formulated in a specific format which corresponds to policymaker needs. Examples of such SPI with a policy-driven focus (or with some of their SPI activities having a policy-driven focus) include:

- At the Belgian level: BelSPO, the Biodiversity Policy Support (BIOPOLS) group at the Royal Belgian Institute for Natural Sciences

### OBJECTIVE 1: ANSWERING POLICY NEEDS Policy-driven focus



# 4. Strategic objectives of the Platform

- At the European level: EKLIPSE and BiodivERsA.
- At the international level: the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice to the Convention on Biological Diversity (SBSTTA), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

The Platform has a prominent role in all of these initiatives, as national focal point, coordinating and/or supporting body. The Platform thus ensures that the needs and priorities of policy-makers are heard by and addressed among the scientific community at the Belgian, European and international levels. The Platform, on the other hand, ensures that these policy-driven initiatives take into account the recommendations of the scientific community, by feeding policy-driven initiatives with resources gathered through the objective 2.

## OBJECTIVE 2 – CATALYSING THE IMPROVEMENT OF RESEARCH PROCESSES

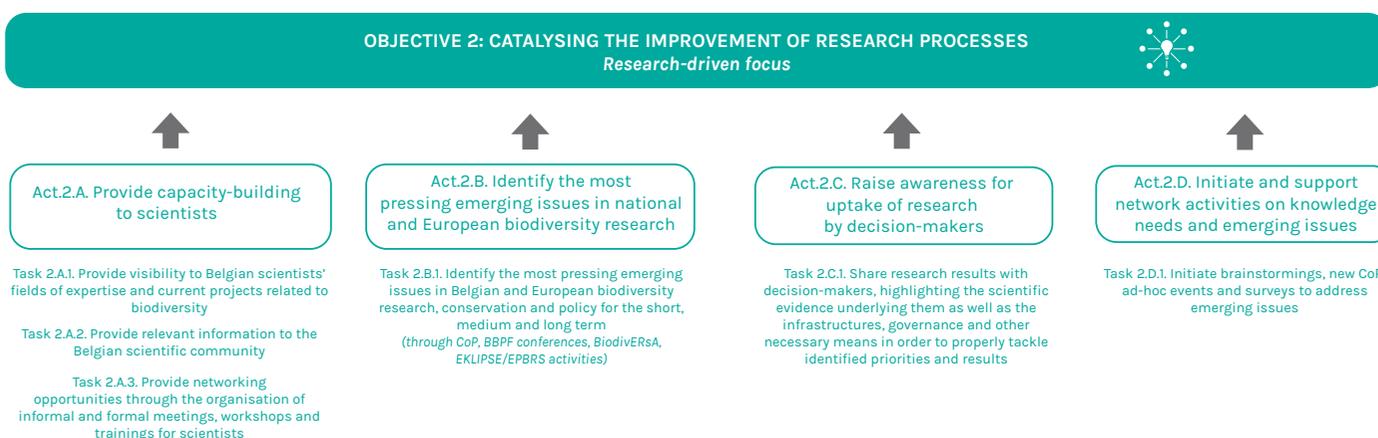
### Activities with a research-driven focus

Catalysing the improvement of research processes is at the heart of the Platform's work. Through a diverse set of activities, the Platform aims to 'serve' the Belgian biodiversity research community by helping to increase the societal impact from the inception and implementation of the research project/activities, towards communication and outreach.

This objective also focuses on research priority scanning (often referred to as 'Horizon Scanning'), which is the systematic search for, and examination of, potentially significant medium- to long-term threats and opportunities that are poorly recognized and addressed. Horizon Scanning exercises can serve different (although related) purposes. They can be designed with a view to gather intelligence as an aid to decision-making, set priorities for future research and policy-making, identify new problems and emerging

threats, raise awareness and promote participation, or as a tool for benchmarking and organizational learning. Through this objective, the Platform ensures that the results of research, but also the observations and concerns of the scientific community are being heard and taken into account by policy-makers and other stakeholders. The Platform thus not only gather information on the currently available scientific information and data, in order to ensure that these are taken into account into decision-makers deliberations, but it also ensures that the scientific community is proactive in suggesting the directions which they see fit to solve societal issues.

Research Priority Scanning activities form an integral part of the Platform’s mandate and are coherent with other strategic objectives such as answering policy needs (Objective 1). They cover the identification of both national and European research priorities and research gaps. These are identified in ad-hoc consultations of the Belgian scientific community at large (The Platform’s work on nature-based solutions is a good example), as well as in the context of the European Platform on Biodiversity Research Strategies (EPBRS), EKLIPSE and the BiodivERsA ERA-net – all in which the Platform has had key roles, including coordination.



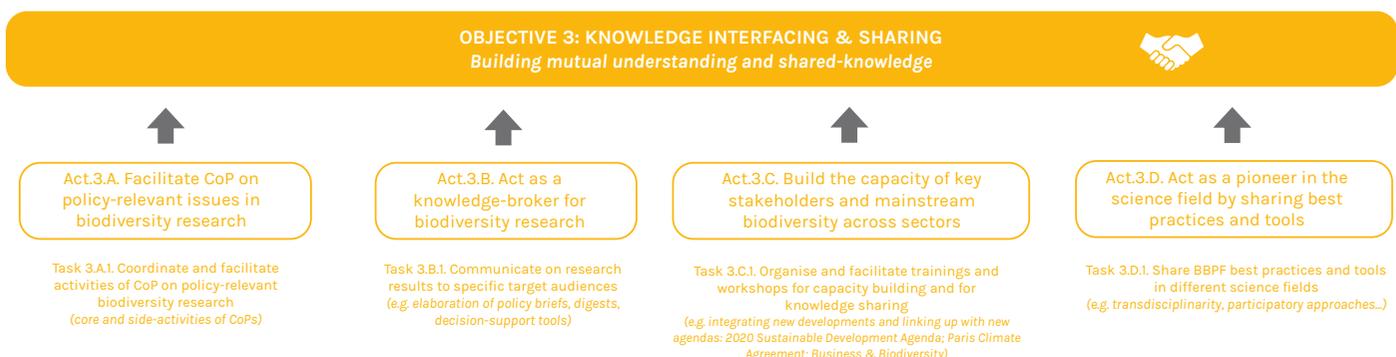
# 4. Strategic objectives of the Platform

## OBJECTIVE 3 - KNOWLEDGE INTERFACING AND SHARING

### Building mutual understanding and shared knowledge

One of the specificities of the Platform, which has often been seen as a very innovative and flexible format by externals (including by the evaluation panels of 2012 and 2016) lies in its activities establishing a direct dialogue between scientists, decision-makers and practitioners on topical issues. Strengthened by their knowledge of both the decision-makers community (e.g. through its work under objective 1) and of the scientific community (e.g. through its work under objective 2), the Platform experts have an acute knowledge of both communities' difference of opinions and shared values. Both communities generally work with the same objectives in mind (the sustainable use of biodiversity and

long-term solutions to societal issues based on scientific evidence) but with different tools, different levels of understanding of complex issues, and with different sets of language. For this reason, the Platform has established since its early days what is now called "Communities of Practice" (which were previously known as "Forums"). Communities of Practice (CoP) bring together relevant knowledge holders and stakeholders around issues of topical interest. The main method used is to physically bring people together and promote interaction through participatory approaches, which are supported by electronic means (social media, website, digital communications). They are an elegant way of putting together competence on important and emerging issues, particularly transdisciplinary competence.



The Platform's CoP use a variety of means such as meetings, workshops, animation of working groups, initiation of joint projects, electronic consultations etc., in order to facilitate networking, exchange of expertise and social learning. The Platform CoP are central, strong and important within Belgium as well as in the context of the EU and international scene.

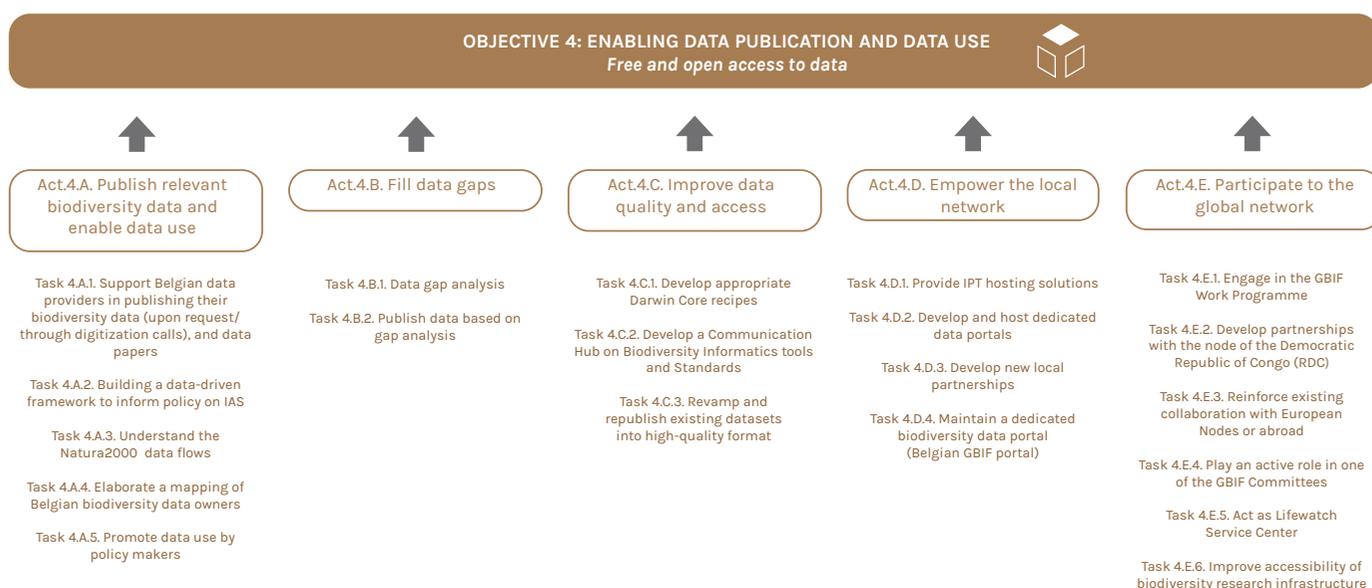
Currently (in 2016), the Platform coordinates three CoPs:

- Belgian Forum on Invasive Species
- Biodiversity and Health
- Belgian Ecosystem Services
- A newly created 'communication hub' on Biodiversity Informatics.

## OBJECTIVE 4 - ENABLING DATA PUBLICATION AND DATA USE

Activities and tools supporting research and SPI through the promotion of free and open access to biodiversity data

This objective is transversal to the three other Platform objectives. It plays a pivotal role in ensuring that all our activities are supported and enabled by the use of credible scientific information made available to all, in the format required by stakeholders (whether they are scientists, policy-makers, practitioners, or the general public). The Platform provides technical support to Belgian research teams for



# 4. Strategic objectives of the Platform

the publication of their biodiversity data (e.g. occurrence data, checklists, metadata), it provides financial support to digitize biodiversity data (i.e. digitization calls), it develops and hosts customized web portals to showcase and encourage the use of biodiversity data, and it provides support for the publication of data papers (i.e. papers related to biodiversity databases). The Platform also provides guidance for the use of relevant bioinformatics standards and tools. Finally, Belgium is also recognized as pioneer in the publication of Sampling-events and Data Papers.

This objective encompasses the Platform's role as Belgian node to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) and is consequently strongly aligned to the 2017-2021 GBIF Strategy. The Belgian BIF gathers some key partners: INBO, Botanical Garden Meise, Natuurpunt, Natagora, RBINS, RMCA, SPW-DEMNA, UGent, ULB, ULg, UMons, VLIZ and WoRMS; but also offers hosting facilities for other (thus far) smaller data publishers (like University of Antwerp

and KULeuven). The Platform also has led several mentoring projects, tools, workshops and document translations.

Still, up to now, the Platform's data mobilization was mostly done through an opportunistic approach, and there are some huge gaps in terms of taxonomical, geographical and time coverage of the datasets that we publish. Similarly, whereas the scientific usage of GBIF data in Belgium is quite strong (exemplified by over 120 Belgian authored publications referring to GBIF.org), GBIF data are largely underused by decision-making processes and environmental reporting data flows. Over the next few years, the Platform will actively engage to remediate this situation.

# 5. Implementation Plan

The following section outlines the tasks planned for the period 2017-2021 to fulfil the Platform's four strategic objectives, taking into account the recommendations from the Platform evaluation of May 2016 (i.e. the rationale to develop these tasks).

Activities are in many cases cross-cutting several strategic objectives but they are listed under only one objective that is considered most relevant.

It should also be noted that the level of attention to each is dynamic and responsive to developments in science, and science policy. Some tasks (e.g. role in SBSTTA, IUCN) may also depend on decisions taken by bodies such as the CCIEP.

## 5.1. Platform Operational Structure and Management

### Target 1: Improve the operational structure and management of the Platform

#### **Rational:**

- The evaluation report highlighted the need to reinforce the creation

- of a management and employment situation that maintains a flexible, collaborative Platform team with a broad set of tasks, and with sufficient eye for long-term stability
- The evaluation report also highlighted that the involvement of the host institute directors is essential because it offers the chance to integrate institutional and Platform activities, for example by fostering contacts between the respective staff involved. The superseding Steering Committee, then again, was judged to be a very important step to include other important stakeholder groups and add legitimacy to the Platform, which in turn allows for more effective working.

#### **Task 1.1. To develop and implement an updated management plan for the Platform**

- Deliverable: An updated 2017-2021 Management Plan for the Platform by the end of 2016

#### **Task 1.2. To clarify the role of the Steering Committee (SC) with respect to strategic development,**

# 5. Implementation Plan

**advisory function, controlling and decision-making; and reinforce regular interactions**

- Deliverable: Approved Terms of Reference for the Steering Committee by the end of 2016; at least two SC meetings per year to ensure that the needs of the government agencies (both federal and regional) could be explored and incorporated into the strategy

**Task 1.3. To create a stable operational structure for the Platform**

- Deliverable: Creation of a stable operational structure and administrative context for the Platform by mid 2017, ensuring continuous employment and an efficient follow-up of the recurrent annual budget

**Task 1.4. To provide an independent basis for annual monitoring and evaluating the Platform's progress towards operational objectives**

- Deliverable: Key performance indicators updated according to the new strategic plan by mid-2017; Success stories in an easy-to-spread format; meeting

reports; continuously updated Responsibility Assignment matrix (RASCI); annual report; annual work plan; annual KPI report

**Task 1.5. To develop tools that can guide the sustainability of existing or new Platform initiatives**

- Deliverable: Designing guidelines concerning the goals and expected impacts of the Platform CoPs and recommendations how to reach these goals, to feed phase-out strategies (i.e. phase-out within the Platform but uptake by the larger community); "success story cases", presenting a successful SPI led by the Platform (e.g. outcomes of one of the CoPs)

**TARGET 2. Improve the financial status of the Platform**

**Rational:**

- The evaluation report highlighted the need to reinforce the creation of a management and employment situation that has sufficient eye for long-term stability. A special role was seen for the Steering Committee as it could help to find ways to integrate financing on the

regional level and from different portfolios.

- The evaluation report identified that the number of obligatory tasks for the Platform is growing while the budget remained the same (i.e. the closed envelop will result in an effective year-to-year reduction which may already become critical early 2017). This situation threatens non-obligatory activities like horizon scanning though these are a major asset of the Platform.

#### **Task 2.1. To secure additional resources for healthy and sustainable Platform**

- Deliverable: By the end of 2018, additional resources (personnel) to cover the Platform's long-term commitments (source still to be defined and discussed with the Steering Committee) and ensure that all activities can be performed adequately in future.

#### **Task 2.2. To clearly document annual budget expenditure**

- Deliverable: Annual budget reports tailored to the Platform's objectives and tasks

## **5.2. Strategic objectives**

As stated above, the four strategic objectives of the Platform are:

**OBJECTIVE 1 - ANSWERING POLICY NEEDS:** Activities with a policy-driven focus

**OBJECTIVE 2 - CATALYSING THE IMPROVEMENT OF RESEARCH PROCESSES:** Activities with a research-driven focus

**OBJECTIVE 3 - KNOWLEDGE INTERFACING AND SHARING:** Building mutual understanding & shared-knowledge

**OBJECTIVE 4 - ENABLING DATA PUBLICATION AND DATA USE:** Activities and tools supporting research and SPI through the promotion of free and open access to biodiversity data

### **OBJECTIVE 1 - ANSWERING POLICY NEEDS**

**Activities with a policy-driven focus**

#### **Rational:**

- Developments at the regional, federal, EU and global levels call for a stronger focus on science-policy collaborations: 1/ Societal needs and policy priorities need to be better relayed to scientists, through a

# 5. Implementation Plan

more structured involvement of stakeholders, including decision makers and policy implementers;

2/ Sound public policy is increasingly dependent on highly complex scientific and technological knowledge, and this requires effective ways of 'translating' this knowledge into clear, actionable messages; and

3/ The very complex nature of some scientific problems (e.g. climate change, invasive alien species, GMOs, synthetic biology) requires collaboration of scientific and extra-scientific actors in order to properly deal with complexity and value pluralism. After over 10 years of experience, time has come for the Platform to put forward a clear strategic approach to supporting SPIs involving Belgian scientists and decision-makers acting at regional, federal and international levels. This strategic approach is: -coherent with other Platform strategic initiatives, such as those concerning horizon scanning and identification of knowledge gaps,

or the Communities of Practice -conducted with a solutions-oriented approach, and offer tools and answers to the challenges of conducting SPI activities (e.g.: trade-offs between the limited mandates of elected political representatives and the longer timeframe of research; how to translate complex scientific knowledge into clear political messages etc.).

- The evaluation panel judged that the Belgian influence and leadership within the EU and international scene is quite noticeable. A contributing factor is that the Platform's organisation provides flexibility and can adapt quickly in order to deliver contributions that support policy developments often providing suggestions and fostering compromises. Being actively involved in several biodiversity initiatives and conventions, the Platform is well-placed to make the critical connections needed to speed up conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, long-term human well-being and sustainable development (cf. its

core mission). This role should be further strengthened.

### **ACTIVITY 1.A: Serve as national focal point for global biodiversity initiatives**

#### **Task 1.A.1. Serve as National Focal Point (NFP) for the IUCN**

- Deliverables: targeted communication products; maintain the IUCN NFP website; organisation of conservation related events; recruitment of experts for the IUCN Commissions; involvement in relevant IUCN task forces; engagement in National, Regional and Global committee meetings; support to the Steering Group Nature of the CCIEP with regard to the coordination of Belgian positions for the World Conservation Congress; report of Belgian delegation to World Conservation Congress; report on network activities etc.

#### **Task 1.A.2. Serve as National Focal Point for IPBES**

- Deliverables: targeted communication products; maintain the IPBES NFP website; awareness events; recruitment of experts for

the assessments and task forces; review of deliverables; Belgian and EU positions for Plenary sessions in collaboration with the Steering Group Biodiversity and Nature of the CCIEP; IPBES Belgian Delegation report; participation in expert workshops

### **ACTIVITY 1.B: Provide scientific input to global biodiversity initiatives**

#### **Task 1.B.1. Organize the input by Belgian experts in SBSTTA and CBD Conference of the Parties**

- Deliverables: Belgian positions in collaboration with the Steering Group Biodiversity of the CCIEP, report on participation to SBSTTA meetings and CBD COP; report of Belgian delegation to SBSTTA and CBD COP meetings

### **ACTIVITY 1.C: Contribute to (european) biodiversity initiatives and legislation**

#### **Task 1.C.1. Represent Belgium in the EU Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystem Services (MAES) working group, ESMERALDA stakeholder group and as Ecosystem Services Partnership (ESP) National Chapter.**

- Deliverables: report on MAES,

# 5. Implementation Plan

ESMERALDA and ESP related activities and projects to the Belgian scientific and policy community from the EU level and vice versa; coordinating the Belgian International Working Group as a community of practice for biodiversity and ecosystem services relevant expertise and initiatives.

**Task 1.C.2. To co-coordinate the BiodivERsA ERA-net, and support and manage Belspo's engagement in this ERA-net to strengthen the European Research Area on biodiversity, ecosystem services and nature-based solutions; and to promote collaboration of Belgian scientists in pan-European biodiversity research communities**

- Deliverables: As Work-package Leader for science-policy interfacing & communication matters, and Vice-chair of BiodivERsA – we produce policy briefs, workshops on science-policy/science-society/science-business interfacing, BiodivERsA's strategic research agenda and other strategic documents, BiodivERsA database and related brochures, communication products etc.

**Task 1.C.3. Represent Belgium in the EU Scientific Forum on Invasive Alien Species.**

The Platform represents Belgium in the forum that provides advice to the Commission on any scientific questions related to the application of the Regulation (EU) No 1143/2014 on Invasive Alien Species

- Deliverables: active participation to meetings of the EU Forum on IAS. Reviewing of risk assessments of alien species candidates for inclusion to the list of species of EU concern.

**Task 1.C.4. Support the National Scientific Secretariat on Invasive Alien Species (IAS)**

The Platform supports the Belgian implementation of the EU regulation on Invasive Species (EU) No 1143/2014 in accordance with the tasks appointed to the Platform in article 22 and 23 of the Cooperation Agreement between the Federal State, the Communities and the Regions on the prevention and control of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species.

- Deliverables: Maintaining and

updating the Harmonia Information system on IAS, develop decision support tools such as risk assessment protocols (Harmonia+) and facilitating risk assessments of alien species candidates for inclusion to the list of species of EU concern.

**Task 1.C.5. Co-ordinate the EKLIPSE project and the development of a long-term European Mechanism to strengthen the SPI for biodiversity and ecosystem services in Europe.**

- Deliverables: weekly coordination skypes; project reporting; contribution to various WP tasks and deliverables, as appropriate.

**Task 1.C.6. Support LTER (Long-Term Ecological Research) Belgium**

- Deliverables: Website; meetings; reports.

**ACTIVITY 1.D: Contribute to national coordination activities**

**Task 1.D.1. Active involvement in the CCIEP steering groups Biodiversity Convention and Nature**

- Deliverables: active participation to meetings of the steering groups (cf.

meeting reports).

**Task 1.D.2. Active involvement in the National Scientific Council on IAS and observer in the National Committee on IAS**

- Deliverables: active participation to meetings of the IAS scientific council and Committee.

**OBJECTIVE 2 – CATALYSING THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROCESSES**

**Activities with a research-driven focus**

**Rational:**

- Serving the Belgian scientific research community, and helping them to increase the societal impact of their research is at the heart of the Platform’s work, as also highlighted in the Cooperation Agreement.

- The evaluation panel judged that the ‘non-obligatory’ Research Priority Scanning activities (also called ‘Horizon Scanning activities’) were one of the most important tasks of the Platform. Hence, the Platform should maintain its forward-looking attitude towards the identification

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of new and emerging issues and initiatives in biodiversity research, and to respond to upcoming challenges and opportunities.

## **Activity 2.A: Provide capacity building to scientists**

### **Task 2.A.1. Provide visibility to Belgian scientists' fields of expertise and current projects related to biodiversity.**

- Deliverables: conduct interviews on the activities of researchers (focusing on the human aspect of their research: their field of interest, where it comes from and what the results of their research will bring) to be published on the Platform newsflashes, Platform website, and Twitter account.

### **Task 2.A.2. Provide relevant information to the Belgian scientific community**

- Deliverables: Publish news relevant to the scientists on the Platform website and Twitter account (e.g. calls for funding, scientific events and meetings, scientific papers, policy briefs presenting research results, etc.)

### **Task 2.A.3. Provide networking opportunities through the organisation of informal and formal meetings, workshops and trainings for scientists**

- Deliverables: Organisation of conferences, meetings, trainings, contact groups whereby scientists get the chance to meet and exchange their views.

## **Activity 2.B: Identify the most pressing emerging issues in national and European biodiversity research**

### **Task 2.B.1 Identify the most pressing emerging issues in Belgian and European biodiversity research, conservation and policy for the short, medium and long term (through CoPs, BiodivERsA and EKLIPSE/EPBRS activities)**

- Deliverables: Input in the Horizon2020 Programme (through the Programme Committee), Desk research reports; expert assessments which can involve a broader consultation of specialists from several related disciplines (e.g. Delphi processes); social participatory processes, aiming to

bring stakeholder input into the identification of socially relevant emerging issues. For example - during the 4 years of the EKLIPSE project: several Horizon scanning exercises and workshops as well as e-conferences and large summits will be organized generating sets of emerging issues and research priorities.

**Activity 2.C: raise awareness for uptake of research by decision-makers**

**Task 2.C.1. Share research results with decision makers, highlighting the scientific evidence underlying them as well as the infrastructures, governance and other necessary means in order to properly tackle identified priorities and results**

• Deliverables: information sessions and/or briefs for decision makers; these can be widely applicable, or targeting a specific level (regional, national or European)

**Activity 2.D: initiate and support network activities on knowledge-needs and emerging issues**

**Task 2.D.1. Initiate brainstormings,**

**new CoPs, ad hoc events and surveys to address emerging issues**

• Deliverables: organization of the annual Platform Conference; initiation of new CoPs/contact groups/external projects

**OBJECTIVE 3: KNOWLEDGE INTERFACING AND SHARING**

Building mutual understanding and shared knowledge

**Rational:**

• CoPs are an elegant way of putting together competence on important and emerging issues, particularly transdisciplinary competence. The Platform CoPs are central, strong and important within Belgium (sharing experiences within and between regions) as well as in the context of the EU and international scene, and longterm sustainability should be ensured.

**Activity 3.A: Facilitate Cops on issues in biodiversity research**

**Task 3.A.1. Coordinate and facilitate activities of CoPs on issues in biodiversity research**

This includes both core activities of the CoP (including systematic

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creening of policy domains for science-policy interfacing opportunities) and side activities of CoPs (such as the BEES Xmas market)

- Deliverables: dedicated websites, organization of workshops/ meetings/think-thanks/competence building events, reports, publications – as appropriate

## **Activity 3.B. Act as a knowledge-broker for biodiversity research**

**Task 3.B.1. Communicate on research results to specific target audiences (e.g. elaboration of policy briefs, digests, decision-support tools)**

- Deliverables:
  - Policy briefs / other tools elaborated by the CoP and presenting policy recommendations useful to Belgian and European/international policy makers.
  - Policy briefs / other tools focusing on results of research projects led by Belgian scientists and relevant to policy hot topics.
  - Policy briefs / other tools elaborated in collaboration with European colleagues within the European networks and projects we take part

in.  
-Digests; decision support tools.

## **Activity 3.C. Build the capacity of key stakeholders and mainstream biodiversity across sectors**

**Task 3.C.1. Organise and facilitate trainings and workshops for capacity building and for knowledge sharing. This would include integrating new developments and linking up with new agendas: 2020 Sustainability Agenda; Paris Climate Agreement; Business & Biodiversity activities; Common Agricultural Policy post 2020; Multiannual Financial Framework post 2020; Evaluation of Life in 2017)**

- Deliverables: workshops, trainings, reports.

## **Activity 3.D. act as pioneer in the science field by sharing best practices and tools**

**Task 3.D.1. Share BBPF best practices and tools (e.g. transdisciplinarity, participatory approaches etc) in different science fields**

- Deliverables: workshops, trainings, conferences, reports, memos.

## OBJECTIVE 4 - ENABLING DATA PUBLICATION AND DATA USE

Activities and tools supporting REsearch and SPI through the promotion of free and open access to biodiversity data

### Activity 4.A. publish relevant biodiversity data and enable data use

#### **Rational:**

- The evaluation report confirmed that usage of the data should drive our data mobilization efforts. Focusing on biodiversity data relevant to environmental decision making and regional/national/international reporting mechanisms will thus be our priority. Using the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) to make such information publicly available is not only our mandate, but it is also the best solution to ease data flow between all involved actors. This covers, amongst others, threatened species, protected areas, protected habitats and invasive species.
- Beside this users driven approach, the opportunistic data mobilization of specimens data and scientific sampling should continue and embrace all potential stakeholders

institutions, NGOs, individual scientists and amateurs.

#### **Task 4.A.1. Support Belgian data providers in publishing their biodiversity data (upon request/through digitization calls) and data papers**

Deliverables: published datasets and papers.

#### **Task 4.A.2. Building a data-driven framework to inform policy on IAS**

Deliverables: With key IAS actors, the Platform will develop 1/ a data mobilization framework for Alien Species data (occurrences, sampling-events and checklists) from diverse data sources; and 2/ data-driven procedures for risk evaluation

#### **Task 4.A.3. Understand Natura2000 data flows**

- Deliverables: A mapping of Natura2000 actors and flows of data between them.

#### **Task 4.A.4. Elaborate a mapping of Belgian biodiversity data owners**

- Deliverables: Belgian data flow mapping, not only showing the

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institutes that have already opened up their data, but also capturing other key players that do not (yet). Hence, this document will give an estimation of biodiversity data potentially reachable in Belgium. In case data are (being) published, the document will show through which means. When data are not yet published, the document will list the existing barriers to open access as perceived by the data owners. These barriers could be technical, political, financial, scientific (embargo), behavioral... to mention a few. This mapping will be updated at regular intervals.

## **Task 4.A.5. Promote data use by policy makers**

- Deliverables: CoP results in sharing data to decision-makers and practitioners within CoP; GBIF results and tools used to promote data use by policy-makers and action plan to replicate these efforts at Belgian level.

## **Activity 4.B. Fill data gaps**

### **Rational:**

- We should assess the presently

published datasets, their strengths and weaknesses to address identified users needs. The Platform should find data gaps, in terms of taxonomy, geography, time and/or data types, and take appropriate actions to fill them.

- E.g. mobilization of data on micro-organisms (incl. soil biodiversity), paleodata, and contribution to the Global Genome Biodiversity Data Initiative (GGBI) which provides access to DNA and tissue collections using GBIF and Taxonomic Database Working Group (TDWG) standards.

## **Task 4.B.1. Data gap analysis**

- Deliverables: gap analysis report that will identify existing gaps in data published by Belgium. Taxonomic, geographic, temporal or institutional gaps will be investigated.

## **Task 4.B.2. Publish data based on gap analysis**

- Deliverables: published datasets (upon request/through digitization calls) (and data papers filling the gaps identified by the Data gap analysis (Task 4.B.1).

### Activity 4.C. Improving data quality and access

#### **Rational:**

- TDWG standards and tools offer new possibilities and will continue to evolve. The Platform should find appropriate ways (training, workshops, community of practice, tools) to guarantee the quality and completeness of all newly mobilized data. Earlier datasets could be revamped/republished to reach the same level of quality and completeness. This could be achieved by developing Darwin Core recipes that capture information for required or strongly recommended fields, and describe final pre-publication data-quality checks.

#### **Task 4.C.1. Develop appropriate Darwin Core recipes**

- Deliverables: Darwin Core recipes (or guidelines) will be developed to cover various thematics or use cases, e.g. Freshwater, Invasive Alien Species etc. These reference documents will detail what should be mapped and how to map research/collections databases into DarwinCore terms. The idea behind these recipes is to

improve data completeness and homogeneity for specialized datasets for future data publishers to refer to.

#### **Task 4.C.2. Develop a Communication Hub on Biodiversity Informatics tools and Standards**

- Deliverables: informal meetings and workshops to share information on latest projects and initiatives related to biodiversity informatics tools and standards with participants involved in the Biodiversity and Informatics Conference ‘Empowering Biodiversity Research’ held on 21 May 2015.

#### **Task 4.C.3. Revamp and republish existing datasets into high-quality format**

- Deliverables: high quality datasets (and data papers)

### Activity 4.D. Empower the local network

#### **Rational:**

- Belgian actors are a heterogeneous network of organizations and individuals. The Platform should support all of them with appropriate services: consultancy, help desk, hosting solutions, installation,

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trainings and IT support. Investing in this Belgian BIF network, and encouraging best practice sharing will inevitably lead to growing interest in data publication and use. Advocating Open Data, amongst life sciences in particular, but also more generally, will remain an important activity. The Platform should also develop a clear data portal strategy with defined audiences.

## **Task 4.D.1. Provide IPT hosting solutions**

- Deliverables: GBIF tools (Integrated Publishing Toolkit - IPT, Harvesting and Indexing Toolkit - HIT) installation and data publisher helpdesk and support, including licensing.

## **Task 4.D.2. Developing and hosting of dedicated data portals**

- Deliverables: launching of new dedicated data portals; maintenance of existing ones.

## **Task 4.D.3. Develop new local partnerships**

- Deliverables: Outreach activities where new potential partners are approached and/or dormant

partnerships are reactivated.

## **Task 4.D.4. Maintain a dedicated biodiversity data portal (Belgian GBIF portal)**

- Deliverable: regularly updated Belgian GBIF portal content and addition of functionalities requested by the portal users. A users survey will be designed to gather users needs and expectations.

This objective will also be supported/implemented through the communication hub on Biodiversity Informatics tools and Standards

## **Activity 4.E. Participate to the global network**

### **Rational:**

- The Platform should contribute to GBIF Implementation Plan by offering concrete commitments. It should also continue its recurring collaborations with others European nodes through the Capacity Enhancement Support Programme but also abroad through Biodiversity Information for Development (BID) and/or Biodiversity Information Fund for Asia (BIFA).

#### **Task 4.E.1. Engage in the GBIF Work Programme**

- Deliverables: report on GBIF Governing Board and regional meetings, contact group meetings/ consultations, BE position on GBIF GB documents.

#### **Task 4.E.2. Develop partnerships with Democratic Republic Congo (DRC) node**

- Deliverables: Reinforcement of DRC node capacity and bilateral collaborations.

#### **Task 4.E.3. Reinforce existing collaboration with European Nodes or abroad**

- Deliverables: (will depend on future opportunities)

#### **Task 4.E.4. Play an active role in one of the GBIF Committees**

- Deliverables: Belgium visibility in GBIF Committees raised.

#### **Task 4.E.5. Act as Lifewatch Service Center**

- Deliverables: meeting reports, communication activities, involvement in the establishment

and /or implementation of Belgian Federal Lifewatch projects etc.

#### **Task 4.E.6. Improve accessibility of biodiversity research infrastructures**

- Deliverables: Mapping of different research infrastructures that are currently at hand of the Belgian research community, and assess to what extent they are accessible, usable, enough/sufficiently known. This task would also include assessing which research questions, or funding schemes would be most appropriate to allow optimally allow researchers to use these Research Infrastructures.

### **5.3. Transversal activities**

#### **IT support**

##### **Rational:**

- The evaluation report highlighted that stable and competent IT support is seen as a major asset for work across the Platform

#### **IT Task 1: Develop and maintain the Platform communication tools**

- Deliverables: continuously updated Platform web sites (incl. meetings,

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CoPs), other ICT tools such as news flash mailing list, RSS feed, social networks. Annual report on web usage statistics.

**IT Task 2: Provide punctual support to new biodiversity data project kernels and coaching related to database and portal needs of Platform externally funded data projects.**

- Deliverables: construction of customized databases and web portals, report on involvement in external projects.

**IT Task 3: Maintain IT infrastructure in adequacy with the support of Platform services.**

## Communication support

### **Rational:**

- The evaluation report judged that proper communication is key to the Platform's success. It, however, pointed to several shortcomings that need urgent remediation through the development and implementation of a revised communication strategy.

**Communication Task 1: Elaborate**

**and implement a revised communication strategy 2017-2020**

- Deliverables: Revised communication strategy updated every two year with clear milestones. Specific attention will be paid to increasing the visibility of the Platform and to ensure that key audiences have a good understanding of the Platform role and the type of services they can expect from it. Evaluation of the different communication tools with respect to their impact and the cost-efficiency.

**Communication Task 2: Revamp the Platform website**

- Deliverables: revamped website responding to different user communities needs, guiding visitors through a clear structure, and providing key information to scientific and non-scientific audiences.

**Communication Task 3: Publish relevant information on a regular basis**

Updating information on biodiversity research and research policy using the Platform's communication tools.

- Deliverables: Platform news, Platform Newsflashes, continuously updated content for Platform and topical websites, social media update (Twitter account) .

**Communication Task 4: Organize, in collaboration with Platform and other experts, events to enhance the capacity of Belgian scientists in national and international science and science-policy initiatives**

- Deliverable: workshops, workshop documents and reports; Publications (folders, reports: layout), annual Platform conference, annual reports, workshops.

**Communication Task 5: Provide communication support to Platform experts**

- Deliverable: Publications (e.g.: layout of topical leaflets/ graphs and documents needed by the Platform experts), advice and support on the use of communication tools by Platform experts.

# Annex: List of abbreviations

**BBPF:** Belgian Biodiversity Platform

**BEES:** BElgian Ecosystem Services, one of the Platform's Communities of Practice

**BFIS:** Belgian Forum on Invasive Species, one of the Platform's Communities of Practice

**CBD:** Convention on Biological Diversity

**CCPIE:** Comité de coordination de la politique internationale de l'environnement

**CoP:** Communities of Practice

**COP:** Conference of the Parties (Convention on Biological Diversity)

**EKLIPSE:** EU Knowledge and Learning Mechanism for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

**ESP:** Ecosystem Services Partnership

**EPBRS:** the European Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

**GBIF:** Global Biodiversity Information Facility

**GGBDI:** Global Genome Biodiversity Data Initiative

**IAS: Invasive Alien Species**

**IPBES: the Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services**

**IUCN: the International Union for the Conservation of Nature**

**KPI: Key Performance Indicator**

**ILTER: Long-Term Ecological Research network**

**MAES: Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystem Services**

**NFP: National Focal Point**

**RASCI: Responsibility Assignment Matrix**

**SC: Platform Steering Committee**

**SPI: Science-Policy Interface**

**SBSTTA: Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the CDB**

**TDWG: Taxonomic Database Working Group**

