

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-002321/24
to the Commission
Li Andersson (The Left)
(30 October 2024)**

Subject: The criteria for old growth and primary forests in Finland conflict with the EU's biodiversity strategy

As an EU Member State, Finland has undertaken to comply with the EU's biodiversity strategy. The strategy calls on Member States to protect all primary forests and all old growth forests. The Commission has drawn up criteria for defining and identifying such forests. The national criteria that Member States adopt must be in line with the guidelines and be based on science.

The Finnish Government chose to apply criteria that will restrict protection solely to forests that are both old growth and primary at the same time.

According to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), previous surveys have identified the existence of 700 000 hectares of old growth and primary forests worthy of protection, but if the Government's new criteria are applied, only a fraction of these would be protected.

According to the Finnish Government's criteria, protected forests only include very rare types of forest, not found, for example, in southern Finland. Scientists are of the view that these criteria do not achieve the objectives of the EU's biodiversity strategy and that they conflict with scientific knowledge.

1. In consideration of the crucial importance of forests and from the point of view of biodiversity and climate resilience, what does the Commission intend to do in a situation where the criteria that Finland has selected to define old growth and primary forests do not correspond to the Commission guidelines and are not based on science?
2. Under Finland's government programme, 'old growth, primary-like forests' are to be preserved. However, the EU's biodiversity strategy calls for the protection of both old growth AND primary forests. Is the Finnish Government's policy, where both criteria are required simultaneously, in line with the EU's biodiversity strategy?
3. What will the Commission do in a situation where the national criteria set by Member States do not correspond to the Commission's guidelines and are not sufficient to achieve the objectives of the EU's biodiversity strategy?

Submitted: 30.10.2024

**Answer given by Ms Roswall on behalf of the European Commission
(3 January 2025)**

1. The EU Biodiversity Strategy ⁽¹⁾ commits to strictly protect all remaining EU primary and old-growth forests. The Commission services are not in a position to undertake a formal compliance assessment of the national process of defining primary and old-growth forests, due to their voluntary nature. Nevertheless, the Commission will continue the dialogue with the competent authorities to ensure the effective protection of these forests, in line with the definitions and criteria agreed in the process of drafting the Commission guidelines ⁽²⁾.
2. The guidelines establish distinct definitions of primary and old-growth forests with the aim of protecting both categories. Old-growth forests explicitly include secondary forests 'of native tree species that have developed, predominantly through natural processes, structures and dynamics normally associated with late seral development phases in primary or undisturbed forests of the same type'. While Member States will develop and use their own methodology to conduct the identification of old-growth forests, they are expected to respect the definitions and criteria outlined in the guidelines.
3. The Commission will continue communication and outreach activities with the relevant actors in Member States to ensure that the targets formulated in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, as well as those committed to in the guidelines, are met.

⁽¹⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030_en

⁽²⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/guidelines-defining-mapping-monitoring-and-strictly-protecting-eu-primary-and-old-growth-forests_en