

Monitoring and assessment of the ecological, economic and social impacts of the METSO Forest Biodiversity Programme for Southern Finland

II interim report

Views of researchers and stakeholder groups

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Summary

The Second Interim Monitoring and Evaluation Report on the METSO Programme compiles the views of researchers and stakeholder groups on the protection of biodiversity on the basis of meetings, questionnaires distributed at the meetings, and interviews with stakeholder representatives in 2005.

Views and opinions were sought particularly on the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the METSO Programme, and on the possible application of METSO Programme measures and the implementation of forest conservation from 2006 onwards. The aim of the Interim Report is to compile the widest possible selection of different views that have emerged in group work at meetings, discussion, responses to questionnaires and in stakeholder interviews. The views presented in the Interim Report are not the unanimous conclusions of the groups concerned, and conclusions or proposed measures will not be based on them. The questionnaire materials are very limited and have mainly been used descriptively. The views compiled in the Interim Report are part of the extensive evaluation of the ecological, economic and social effects of the METSO programme using various types of material that will be completed by the end of 2006.

In general, both researchers and stakeholder groups felt that a wide range of measures was needed in order to secure biodiversity. It was considered important to take economic and social aspects into account in addition to ecological ones where the choice of conservation sites was concerned. The importance of taking the social effects of measures designed to protect biodiversity into account was particularly highlighted by the stakeholder groups; examples included the impact of conservation on the forest industry as a whole, the regional and local impact on employment and on the general vitality of rural areas. Even though the setting of targets for conservation was generally regarded to be important, the setting of detailed targets for conservation areas in terms of specific percentages or hectares was criticised by some respondents.

Both researchers and stakeholders considered improved nature management in commercial forests to be a fairly important means of ensuring biodiversity, particularly in view of the large areas of commercial forest. For certain sites, forest habitat restoration was considered a correct means to ensuring biodiversity, but there was some criticism on the lack of monitoring of the targets set for forest habitat restoration and its effectiveness.

It was generally felt that the fact that conservation is carried out on a voluntary basis in trade with natural values, competitive tendering and co-operation networks tends to make conservation more acceptable to forest owners and also serves to improve the general attitude towards forest conservation. Fixed-term conservation was criticised for being an ecologically uncertain solution, but it was, however, pointed out that fixed-term conservation is a viable option for certain types of sites. The importance of advisory services and guidance through information provision was emphasized, particularly if nature management and voluntary conservation measures are to be among the key means to protecting biodiversity in the future.

Larger conservation areas were generally felt to be ecologically more sound than smaller ones, but conservation of certain small sites such as traditional agricultural biotopes was nevertheless felt to be an important aspect of the protection of biodiversity. The proximity to conservation sites was also considered an essential factor that should be taken into account in designing and constructing a network of conservation sites.

It was felt that the METSO Programme had a positive effect on public opinion of forest conservation, particularly among forest owners. It was suggested that one of METSO's biggest achievements may in fact be that attitudes to conservation have become more positive as a result of the Programme.

Where monitoring of the METSO Programme was concerned, respondents wanted, among other things, monitoring data on what types of sites the METSO measures can provide protection for, whether these sites differ from previously protected sites and what the total ecological impact of the measures is. It was considered important to study the effect of forest habitat restoration and fixed-term conservation. Investigation of the cost-effectiveness of the measures for ensuring biodiversity was also proposed. When it came to the need for monitoring economic and socio-cultural effects, the focus was on social effects in a broad sense, including the impact on timber production, employment, the vitality of rural areas and the recreational use of forests.