

Invasive Alien Species Regulation

State of Play

Invasive alien species (IAS) are species that are initially transported through human action outside of their natural range across ecological barriers, and that then survive, reproduce and spread, and that have negative impacts on the ecology of their new location as well as serious economic and social consequences. It has been estimated that of the over 12 000 alien species that are found in the European environment, 10-15 % eventually become invasive.

The impact of IAS on biodiversity is significant: IAS are one of the major, and growing, causes of biodiversity loss and species extinction. When it comes to social and economic impacts, IAS can be vectors of diseases or directly cause health problems (e.g. asthma, dermatitis and allergies). They can damage infrastructure and recreational facilities, hamper forestry or cause agricultural losses. IAS are estimated to cost the European economy at least € 12 billion per year and damage costs are continuing to rise. Due to the expansion of trade and mobility and increasing environmental disturbances, IAS introductions are increasing at an accelerated pace.

Although some existing EU directives and regulations already partially addressed certain aspects of the IAS problem, mainly the plant and animal health regimes, a major legislative gap still remained, as identified by the 2020 Biodiversity Strategy. The adopted Regulation on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species (the IAS Regulation) aims at closing the policy gap and meet the EU biodiversity targets as well as the EU international commitments under the Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD).

Implementation of the IAS Regulation

The legislative proposal was published in September 2013. The final text of the Regulation was signed by the Parliament and the Council on 22 October 2014. The Regulation will enter into force on 1 January 2015.

The Regulation is structured around three main pillars, reflecting the internationally recognised approach of the CBD: (1) prevention; (2) early detection and rapid eradication of new populations; and (3) management of IAS that are widely spread.

The core of the system is a list of IAS of Union concern, which the Commission will develop on the basis of objective criteria and risk assessments and with the full involvement of a Committee of Member States representatives. A scientific forum will support the process. Species listed will be effectively banned from the EU and it will not be possible to introduce, trade, keep, breed nor release them (limited exceptions for uses in confined conditions are possible). Furthermore a series of measures will apply to prevent their entry, to ensure their early detection and rapid eradication (derogations possible under certain circumstances) and to manage the IAS already present in the EU.

Other obligations for MS linked to the listed species include: 1) development of action plans to manage the pathways of their introduction, i.e. the routes through which these species enter into and spread within the EU; 2) organise surveillance and immediately notify new appearances of listed IAS to the Commission and the other MS.

Other provisions are not linked to the listed species: 1) MS may take emergency measures to address unlisted IAS while they prepare their application for listing; 2) IAS for which EU action is not considered appropriate but are of concern to a MS or to a group of MS, can be addressed through action at national and regional level; 3) Outermost Regions (ORs) are treated under a similar but separate regime whereby each OR will have its own specific list of IAS of concern.

The whole system will be underpinned by a platform to enable access to distributed data sources on alien species: the European Alien Species Information Network (EASIN), created by JRC, which will form the core of the information exchange mechanism and is crucial for the implementation of the Regulation.

As soon as the Regulation has entered into force the Commission will proceed towards the establishment of the Committee and the Scientific Forum.