



STATEMENT BY

MR. BRAULIO F. DE SOUZA DIAS

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

to the

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR

**“TOWARDS LINKING ECOSYSTEMS AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES TO
ECONOMIC AND HUMAN ACTIVITY”**

New York, United States of America

27 - 29 November 2012



**Convention on
Biological Diversity**

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
United Nations Environment Programme
413 Saint-Jacques Street, Suite 800, Montreal, QC, H2Y 1N9, Canada
Tel : +1 514 288 2220 Fax : +1 514 288 6588
secretariat@cbd.int www.cbd.int



LINKING ECOSYSTEMS AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES TO ECONOMIC AND HUMAN ACTIVITY

Mr. Peter Harper, chair of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting,

Mr. Walter Radermacher, Director General of Eurostat,

Ms. Shamshad Akhtar, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs,

Professor Thomas Lovejoy, Biodiversity Chair of the Heinz Center for Science, Economics and the Environment, and – I have to add – long-time supporter of the Convention on Biological Diversity,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

It gives me great pleasure to be with you today and speak on linking ecosystems, ecosystem services, and biodiversity to economic and human activities.

In fact, addressing these linkages and translating them into international guidance and policy action has been a key *leitmotif* in the recent work of the Convention, and in particular in the process that led to the adoption, in 2010, of the new Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020.

As many of you are well aware, the loss of biological diversity – the variability among living organisms, including diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems – is taking place at unprecedented levels. At the beginning of the last decade, the international community had already adopted a strategic plan under the Convention, including a global biodiversity target – namely, to significantly reduce the current rate of biodiversity loss by 2010.

However, despite some progress made, we collectively failed to reach this target. One of the main reasons that was identified in the subsequent analyses and discussions was that there has been insufficient integration of biodiversity issues into broader policies, strategies, programmes, and actions, including decision-making in economic sectors – essentially an absence of what we call the ‘mainstreaming’ of biodiversity. As a consequence, the underlying drivers of biodiversity loss were neither adequately addressed nor significantly reduced.

At the same time, we made a lot of progress in better understanding the contribution of nature (and its variability) to human well-being, including economic well-being. The last decade saw the publication of the global Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, undertaken in 2005 with the active cooperation of over 1000 scientists. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment made a path-breaking contribution towards conceptualizing and popularizing the now-familiar concept of ‘ecosystem services’, the genuinely economic aspects of which were subsequently carried forward by the more recent studies on the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB).

To sum up, we made intellectual progress on two critical aspects: first, we more and more recognized that, in order to effectively reduce and halt biodiversity loss, we need to address and alter economic decision-making, including decisions related to production and consumption patterns – issues which go beyond the reach and remit of traditional biodiversity policies. In addition, we much improved our understanding of the contribution of biodiversity, through ecosystem services, to human well-being.

The new Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 states this understanding very clearly and prominently: the first paragraph of its rationale explains that biological diversity underpins ecosystem functioning; for instance, by making ecosystems more resilient. It thus underpins the provision of ecosystem services that are essential for human well-being. It provides for food security, human health,

the provision of clean air and water; it contributes to local livelihoods, and economic development, and is essential for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, including poverty reduction.

The mission of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 also makes this linkage very explicit, by calling for effective and urgent action to halt the loss of biodiversity in order to ensure that by 2020, ecosystems are resilient and continue to provide essential services, thereby securing the planet's variety of life, and contributing to human well-being, and poverty eradication.

The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 takes on the challenge of mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society, by making it the first of its five strategic priorities and devoting four of its twenty Aichi Biodiversity Targets to it. Specific actions foreseen to achieve mainstreaming include:

- (a) Continue raising awareness of the values of biodiversity and associated ecosystem services (Aichi Biodiversity Target 1);
- (b) Integrate biodiversity values into national and local development strategies and planning processes (Aichi Biodiversity Target 2);
- (c) Thoroughly realign society's incentives towards sustainability, including by eliminating or reforming incentives that are harmful – this includes harmful subsidies – and by promoting positive incentives (Aichi Biodiversity Target 3);
- (d) Encourage, promote, and support sustainable production and sustainable consumption (Aichi Biodiversity Target 4).

In order to achieve the mainstreaming agenda, there is a critical precondition: we need to have more reliable and systematic collections of data on the status and trends of ecosystems, associated ecosystem services, and underlying biodiversity, including statistical information. In the words of the TEEB report, “we need to measure better so that we can manage better”.

It is precisely for this reason that Aichi Biodiversity Target 2 also calls for the incorporation of biodiversity values into national accounting, as appropriate, and reporting systems more generally.

Against this background, it was very fortunate that the work programme for the revision of the United Nations System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) included the strengthening of ecosystem accounting. It is a great pleasure to note that this work is progressing well, with the draft guidance, in the form of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounts, being in an advanced stage and now before us.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 provides a global road map for action towards halting biodiversity loss. National Governments throughout the globe are now working towards translating the Strategic Plan and its twenty targets into national policies. As they start their work on how to best integrate biodiversity and ecosystems into their national accounts, as foreseen by Aichi Biodiversity Target 2, and to strengthen their existing work thereon, it will be natural for them to look at SEEA as the authoritative international guidance on environmental accounting. This will be even more so as the SEEA Central Framework has now been elevated to an international statistical standard by the United Nations Statistical Commission, an achievement for which I wish to commend and congratulate UNCEEA – through you, Mr. Harper – as well as my colleagues from the United Nations Environmental-Economic Accounts Section of the United Nations Statistics Division, here in New York City.

I noted with pleasure that the draft guidance before us not only contains a dedicated chapter on biodiversity, but also draws explicit linkages to the other ecosystem services covered in this particular volume, as well as to critical resource accounts covered in the SEEA Central Framework, such as the land use and land cover accounts. This is very important, and not just because biodiversity underpins ecosystem functioning and the provision of many ecosystem services, as I just explained. It is also important because it implies that achieving an early harvest in implementing ecosystem and biodiversity

accounts can actually make elements in the central framework more useful. For instance, many provisioning services, such as species harvested directly for food, fibre, timber or energy, are captured under the SEEA Central Framework. However, information on the status and trends of the underlying ecosystem that delivers these provisioning services would be very useful – in fact, critical – when seeking to assess the long-term sustainability of these harvests.

Highlighting and harnessing these linkages is also important for another reason. The policy demand for strengthened ecosystem and biodiversity accounts emanating from the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 is not just based on Aichi Biodiversity Target 2 – important as it is. Building on the list of indicators for the 2010 biodiversity target, an indicator framework has now been developed under the Convention that seeks to support the assessment of progress in implementing the current Strategic Plan, and to support countries in “translating” the Strategic Plan into national policy action including the setting of national targets and associated indicators (decision XI/3). In this context, developing national monitoring systems will be critical. Looking through the global indicator framework, strengthened ecosystem and biodiversity accounting can potentially play a very important role in supporting this process and assessing progress in achieving many of the other Aichi Biodiversity Targets, in particular those that seek to reduce the direct pressures on biodiversity and promote sustainable use, and those that seek to improve the status of biodiversity by safeguarding ecosystems, species and genetic diversity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The clock towards 2020 is ticking and, as I mentioned earlier, national Governments are now preparing their implementation of the current Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. This includes, in particular, the ongoing revision of their national biodiversity strategies and action plans, the main national policy framework under the Convention. According to the timetable set up by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, this revision is to be finalized by 2014 at the latest. I therefore wish to invite you to not relent in your efforts, and to bring the development of the ecosystem accounting guidance to a speedy conclusion, so that we can move towards practical implementation. My staff and I remain committed to lending our support both in finalizing the draft and in moving towards practical implementation.

In closing, please allow me to quote from the concept note for this meeting:

The process of drafting the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting and the few practical experiences have demonstrated that compiling such accounts is truly a multidisciplinary undertaking which requires the engagement of expertise from different communities representing different disciplines.

I strongly believe that this is even more important in the actual implementation phase. No community can implement the ecosystem accounts on its own. I therefore wish to close by inviting both the biodiversity community and the statistical community to reach out to each other, to explore opportunities for cooperation, and to work towards the development of a joint agenda for more effective and operational environmental-economic national accounting, including ecosystem accounting.

I hope that the present seminar will provide many opportunities to forge such partnerships, and wish you fruitful discussions and a successful meeting.

Thank you for your attention.
