

Biodiversity Conference – Money Talks: Closing the funding gap for nature restoration

Europe has the funds to save its biodiversity, yet practical deployment remains a challenge. On 2 December 2025, the ELO Biodiversity Conference in Brussels brought together experts from the financial sector, policy makers, scientists, land managers, investors, and representatives of civil society to confront this paradox. The central question was simple yet urgent: How can we finance biodiversity today? How can we turn biodiversity ambition into investable, scalable solutions?

Europe's biodiversity funding: The deployment gap

“Europe doesn't have a financial problem. It has a deployment problem,” stated Eva MAYERHOFER from the European Investment Bank (EIB), stressing that Europe has the capital but lacks the coherent frameworks needed to channel it effectively. She noted that policies and incentives still pull in different directions, creating uncertainty and slowing down action on the ground.

Jurgen TACK, ELO Secretary General reminded participants that, despite this theoretical availability of resources, landowners still face high upfront restoration costs, long-term maintenance burdens, complex administrative procedures, and public funding schemes that rarely cover the full costs, leaving them to carry most of the risk.

Innovative tools and solutions do exist, but scaling restoration requires mechanisms that deliver measurable ecological benefits and fair economic returns for landowners. Private investment can only work if it is supported by strong public funding, legal certainty, and fair benefit-sharing. As Mr TACK put it: “Without trust, there will be no scalable market; without clarity, no investment flow; and without landowners, no restoration at all.”

Aligning policies and finance for a nature-positive future

The first panel explored the financial tools needed to close the gap between ambition and implementation in nature restoration. Heather GRABBE (Bruegel) stressed that the way Member



Delphine DUPEUX
Director of EU Biodiversity Policy and Parliamentary Affairs, ELO



Ludovica MASSIMO
Policy and Project intern, ELO

States choose to implement the Nature Restoration Law will be decisive. Opting only for the lowest-cost measures may allow them to meet the 2030 targets, but at the expense of far higher long-term costs and irreversible losses in carbon and biodiversity benefits.

Thomas FREISINGER (IUCN) highlighted that restoration efforts still rely heavily on public funding, particularly the LIFE programme, and that Member States show very different levels of dependence on EU resources. For him, no single instrument can replace another: tools must complement and reinforce each other rather than compete.

Representing the private sector, Jesús CARRASCO (Iberdrola) explained that companies increasingly view biodiversity not as a burden but as a genuine business opportunity. For Iberdrola, investing in nature means investing in resilience, social value creation, and long-term economic performance.

Eva MAYERHOFER (EIB) outlined several ways to better mobilise private capital, from parametric insurance models to better-targeted guarantees and forest-bond-inspired financing structures.

Together, the panellists stressed that while promising solutions exist, they will only succeed if public authorities, investors, and landowners move in the same direction, supported by clarity, trust, and stable long-term frameworks.

Investing in nature: From metrics to markets

The second panel focused on practical, market-driven approaches to making nature investable and creating income for land managers through natural capital and biodiversity credits. Martin STUCHTEY (Landbanking Group) described how technology and fintech can give every hectare an “ecological passport,” measuring biodiversity, carbon, water, and soil, and linking it to financial instruments. This allows businesses to in-

vest in nature as critical infrastructure, with outcomes-based rewards for land stewards, and opens possibilities for insurance, loans, and landscape funds.

Caroline PRINGLE (Natural-Prosperity) emphasised designing natural capital metrics from the landowner perspective, ensuring they are practical, holistic, and affordable. Her five-year pilot model provides upfront capital to land managers and guarantees them 50% of verified returns, de-risking both investors and landowners while supporting integrated land management.

Heli SIITARI (MTK) highlighted the importance of building trust through robust metrics and verification systems. Finland's habitat-value hectare system, supported by intermediaries like forest management associations, helps landowners engage with nature credit markets. Public-private funding and continuous communication with landowners are essential for success.

Alexandra HOLMLUND (Qarlbo Biodiversity) shared experience with biodiversity credit pilots in production forests, showing how modular, measurable interventions-conservation, restoration, and integrated forest management- can generate returns and scale across geographies. She noted the challenges of market adoption due to past failures in carbon markets but emphasised the potential for resilience and intrinsic value markets.

Overall, the panel highlighted that scalable, credible nature markets require robust metrics, pilots to prove concepts, fi-



nancial infrastructure, and enabling policy frameworks, combining innovation with practical, on-the-ground application.

Nature as an asset, not a cost

Overall, biodiversity finance is transitioning from fragmented efforts to structured, investable nature-based solutions. Success will depend on policy clarity, market infrastructure, and long-term partnerships that treat nature as an economic asset rather than a cost centre.

With a full room, engaging debates, and exceptional speakers, the conference was a clear success. Europe may finally be moving toward a future where nature is not a cost centre, but an essential asset - one deserving of stable, predictable, and large-scale investment.

