Association for European Life Science Universities[1]

COMMUNIQUÉ
LIFE SCIENCES UNIVERSITIES ADDRESSING THE URGENT NEED TO BEND THE CURVE OF BIODIVERSITY LOSS

Biodiversity loss is recognized as one of the most pressing challenges of our time, and poses a direct threat to nature's contributions to people and societal stability. Biodiversity conservation and restoration form part of a nexus of urgent challenges facing humanity, together with food provision for 10 billion people and achieving climate neutrality. In this nexus, biodiversity is our living planetary heritage, providing a crucial asset for future generations to stabilize the climate, and provide the genetic resources for food, medicine and biomaterials of the future.

Along with the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change and the global transition to sustainable food security and safety, biodiversity conservation and restoration must now be addressed with urgency and commitment. The needed overall response is a global transition in the use of marine and terrestrial systems that safeguard biodiversity and evolutionary processes on earth. This will need protection of more water and land area from biodiversity depletion resulting from intensive human activities, and an integration of biodiversity conservation within fisheries, agrifood, forestry, biobased industries, and urban development. The optimal mix of land sparing and land sharing options should be science-based, and fully considering the legacies and opportunities for biodiversity at both the local and global scale. The long-term aim is a sustainable circular bioeconomy in a biodiverse environment supporting healthy and prospering humans and animals in vital ecosystems.

Thus, we the Rectors, Deans and Senior Management of the Association for European Life Science Universities at our Forum, held in Kaunas, Lithuania on 20 and 21 October 2022, addressed the challenges of stabilising and even reversing the loss of biodiversity.

Recognising that university education, research and innovation are vital pillars for the transition to a sustainable circular bioeconomy that conserves, restores and enhances biodiversity; and

[1] The **Association for European Life Science Universities (ICA;** www.ica-europe.info) has a membership of more than 50 European universities or faculties from more than 29 European countries, whose primary interests are in the areas of agriculture, forestry, climate change, food production and consumption, the bio-based sector, natural resources, biodiversity, the protection of the environment, and rural development. ICA and its members aim to jointly play an essential role in transitioning to a European and global sustainable bioeconomy and society. For more information contact ICASecretariat@ica-europe.org

Placing biodiversity conservation, restoration and enhancement together with climate neutrality and sustainable food production at the centre of our learning and research, in collaboration with societal partners, and in our campus operations;

Pledge to political leaders, societal influencers, businesses, and the general public that:

- We will share our understanding of biodiversity, its intrinsic heritage value, its trends and dynamics and its functional significance for the sustainability of natural and urban ecosystems;

- We will combine fundamental research on biodiversity with a quest for nature-based solutions, contributing to conservation, restoration and enhancement of biodiversity along with climate neutrality and sustainable food production in a sustainable circular bioeconomy;

- We will encourage our students – the professionals and decision makers of the future – to internalise all available understanding of the need, means and paths for society to conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity in all types of terrestrial and marine ecosystems;

- We will engage to protect and enhance the biodiversity of our own life science university grounds, campuses and other estates, for them to become enlightening examples and teaching tools for biodiversity-based development.

- We will seek active collaboration with the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPPC), the European Commission and with urban planning and other economic and societal sectors in our regions across Europe. We will engage with the marine, agrifood, forestry, and biobased industries, to stimulate and implement concrete behavioural and institutional changes to effectively curb, and even reverse, the downward trend of biodiversity, and advance the transition to a circular, climate neutral society.