

DEVELOPING FINLAND'S NATURE RESTORATION PLAN: A MID-TERM ASSESSMENT

The Nature Restoration Law (NRL) is a recent, significant piece of nature legislation that covers all terrestrial and marine ecosystems. For its implementation, Member States are required to develop a national Nature Restoration Plan (NRP) by September 2026. The quality of NRPs will determine the law's actual effect to restore ecosystems across Europe. The #RestoreNature coalition has developed a checklist to evaluate the preparation of restoration plans across EU Member States at mid-term, based on four criteria: science-based, inclusiveness, ambition and empowerment. This factsheet provides an assessment of the progress made by Finland in developing its national NRP.

OVERALL PROGRESS

Finland has been a member of the EU since 1995. Finland has national restoration programs and regional biodiversity programs that provide excellent possibilities for implementation. However, Finland lacks a holistic strategy to reduce harmful actions, as to date more nature is destroyed than restored. Also, there is approximately 1M€ gap in nature conservation financing.

- Finland has a solid knowledge base to begin implementing the NRL.
- The preparation of the National Restoration Plan (NRP) is progressing, but the process is constrained by administrative limitations.
- Stakeholders, including NGOs, have not been given opportunities to comment on the draft, and very little information about the preparatory work has been made public.
- Unlikely that science-based FRAs that consider deterioration before 1995 will be used, as Finland has chosen a narrow approach to implementation by setting 1995—the year it joined the EU—as a politically determined primary reference year for the favourable



EARLY STAGE

reference areas (FRA). This approach fails to address that many habitats and species were already in unfavorable condition in 1995.

ASSESSMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Good practices and achievements

- Good practice: Several restoration programs are widely approved and appreciated by virtually all stakeholders for their effective methods and for allowing voluntary participation
- Good practice: Finland has comprehensive, high-quality data and excellent experience with the methods needed for nature restoration.

To be improved

- Additional resources needed: Hiring many more officials with ecological restoration expertise is necessary to lead and coordinate restoration work, ensuring adequate capacity for planning, implementation, and monitoring of projects.
- The government is developing legislation for nature credit markets, but further action is needed, e.g. the “polluter pays” principle should be made mandatory
- Science-based FRA values for habitats were defined by the Finnish Environment Institute, but in the 4th reporting round (Autumn 2025) of the Habitats and Birds Directives, Finland reported the FRA values of all habitats in need of restoration as unknown.
- To date, there has been no genuine opportunity for stakeholders to submit written comments on most of the subject matters.
- While the administration has organised several public events, it has not disclosed which restoration methods will be used, where restoration actions will be targeted, or what the specific objectives and target levels are.
- For instance, the broad habitat type Western Taiga requires restoration covering up to 3.7 million hectares, yet no quantitative targets or implementation pathways have been outlined. Concurrently, biodiversity enhancement should also take place in the remaining forest areas; however, the distinction between protected areas and production forests has not been made in the preparatory process
- The Ministries of the Environment and of Agriculture and Forestry have been developing forest indicators yet target levels for these indicators have not been defined to conduct the impact assessment of these measures. Furthermore, when planning restoration measures and assessing improvements in each indicator, no distinction has been made between the target areas of forest habitats under the EU Habitats Directive and the rest of the forest landscape. As a result, it is not currently possible to carry out a reliable assessment of the potential impacts of the proposed measures.

Delays and inadequacies

- The reference year has been politically set primarily as 1995 (the EU accession year of Finland), when several habitats and species were already in unfavourable state. The science-based FRAs which take account also the pre-1995 deterioration, will therefore mostly not be applied.
- The Finnish government has markedly reduced its budget for nature conservation and has not proposed any increases to support the implementation of the NRP

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Base the NRP on Finland’s high-quality data and science-based reference values.
- Comply with proper stakeholder consultation and ensure a transparent process.
- Produce data on the economic and societal benefits of restoration, as well as on the costs of implementation. In addition, assess the costs and consequences of not fully implementing the NRP.

DETAILED ASSESSMENT

Is the NRP development process...

Key facts

Recommendations

Science-based?



- High-quality data on species and habitat types have been produced, and in many cases, the location is known and should be utilised for implementation.
- Tested and well-functioning restoration methods exist
- FRAs are scientifically defined, but the government has decided not to utilise them. The government has set the reference year to 1995 without any public consultation.

- Set the science-based FRAs as targets for restoring habitat types.
- Fully utilise the existing data on habitat types, acknowledge the high-quality definitions already in place, and start implementation at the locations already identified as valuable.
- Utilise the most effective restoration methods to the full extent.

Inclusive?



- Finland has organised several public events, but hardly any information has been shared on the extent of the goals or the impact of the actions
- No real dialogue has happened between the authorities and stakeholders.

- Present concrete numbers on what, where and how is planned to be restored.
- Present concrete plans with numbers and budgets and invite relevant stakeholders to provide feedback.

Ambitious?



- Several authorities have presented restoration as a possibility for safeguarding, e.g., clean water and food production, but the Finnish government sees it mainly as a cost.
- Finland has had several restoration programs for several years; however, the government has cut their budgets and reduced the number of authorities that implement them.
- Quantitative targets for forests have not been discussed. There is a risk that, in some areas – e.g., forestry – implementation will be close to none, due to lobbying interests behind the government's goals.

- Provide information on the monetary benefits of restoration.
- Create numerical science-based targets for the restoration of forest habitats.

Empowered?



- The government has cut the budget on nature conservation.
- Not all relevant authorities have participated in the process.
- There have been no discussions yet on policies, implementation, or financing.

- Increase Finland's budget on restoration and facilitate private markets based on the polluter-payer principle.
- The Ministry of Finance should take a bigger role in estimating the monetary benefits of the restoration actions.