

## **SUMMARY**

### **Report proposing specific contents of natural landscape and biodiversity conservation to be included in the amended LEP**

Over the past two decades, the rate of biodiversity loss in Vietnam has been increasing due to overexploitation, such as hunting and logging, land use conversion, especially for developing hydropower, roads and industrial zones projects. Pollution of rivers and coastal areas due to socio-economic activities together with climate change leads to degrade the environment and reduce biodiversity.

According to the National Strategy on Biodiversity to 2020, with a vision to 2030, Vietnam strives to achieve by 2030 the goal of 25% of degraded ecosystems of international importance will be restored and biodiversity will be preserved and used sustainably, bringing benefits to the people and significantly contributing to the socio-economic development of the country.

In Vietnam the legal provisions for landscape protection have been mentioned in a number of Laws and sub-law documents, mainly focusing on Laws such as: Law on Biodiversity 2008, Law Urban Planning 2009, Mineral Law 2010, Cultural Heritage Law 2013, Law on Environmental Protection 2014, Law on Forestry 2017, Law on Planning 2017. However, landscape is being understood in different contexts, there is no concept (term) of landscape, which comprehensively shows the contents of the landscape in accordance with science and practice aspects.

Vietnam is famous for its beautiful natural landscapes, environmental impact management tools such as SEA for plans and EIA for projects, which has a history of more than 20 years, make an important contribution to the protection of the natural environment. However, there are still many cases where the natural landscape has been changed in negative ways, which are very difficult or impossible to restore its original status.

In many localities, socio-economic development plans break or damage natural landscapes, historical - cultural heritages; pay little attention to landscapes of environmental and ecological importance such as: important wetlands, areas with high biodiversity, biodiversity corridors (outside nature reservation areas according to regulations of Law on forestry and Law on biodiversity), parks, large green spaces, green belts, forests, rivers, streams, and important flows in urban

and rural areas; not paying attention to the totality and close relationship between components of the landscape.

In the period of industrialization and modernization in recent years, resort projects in nature reservation areas; mining activities and construction investment in coastal zones; tourism projects in specific landscapes... have deformed the natural landscape that is very beautiful and important to the country.

The fragmentation has also affected functions and biodiversity of the landscape. In Vietnam, forest fragmentation is a common phenomenon in all regions, affecting the ability to regulate floods and droughts, threatening many rare and endemic species. Even so, many areas belong to natural heritages, or the heritage of special international value in terms of aesthetics, geology and geomorphology such as Ha Long Bay, Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, Global Geoparks (eg. Dong Van Rock Plateau, Cao Bang Non Nuoc Geopark) ... also had landscape invasive activities. After being broken, many natural landscapes will not be able to restore their original state, leading to many consequences for degradation of ecosystems and biodiversity, and for damages of socio-economic and cultural development, especially tourism activities and biodiversity conservation activities.

The cause of the above adverse consequences is the lack of legal regulations and technical guidelines on natural landscape impact assessment in the strategic environmental assessment (SEA) process for plans, including provincial socio-economic development plans; lack of legal regulations and technical guidelines for assessing adverse impacts on the morphology, structure and function of important landscapes in the environmental impact assessment (EIA) process, as well as for choosing the location of investment projects.

The socio-economic development in recent years shows that it is necessary to soon introduce in the revised Law on Environmental Protection (in the review and completion process) and documents guiding the implementation of this Law regulations on natural landscape management and integration considerations natural landscapes and biodiversity protection in the EIA and SEA process. Based on the research results on international experiences, some principles and contents of natural landscape management and impact assessment are proposed as follows:

*Firstly*, proposing the regulation on management and protection of natural landscapes, including important natural landscapes are sensitive natural landscapes to be identify; management and assessment of impacts on natural landscapes should be strengthened through EIA to protect landscapes and

minimize adverse impacts of investment projects on important natural landscapes. Natural landscape protection is a new approach that will contribute to increased efficiency of environmental protection and socio-economic development through maintenance, conservation and sustainable use of the function and value of natural landscape.

*Secondly*, impact assessment on natural landscapes is assessment of potential impacts from the activities of the development projects on the quality of landscape and biodiversity, thereby proposing appropriate and effective mitigation measures, including biodiversity offset. This is essential content implemented in EIA to maintain ecosystems and species in these ecosystems when implementing development projects.

*Thirdly*, regulations on integrating impact assessment on natural landscapes in the SEA and EIA should be specific, focusing on the main contents and on impacts on biodiversity, which must be paid special attention when assessment. National biodiversity standards/criteria/indicators should be developed and issued early to use for comparison when monitoring and evaluating project implementation. In addition, community consultation through the Early Notification (FPIC) process must also be considered as an indispensable important content in the assessment of impacts on landscape and biodiversity, and in biodiversity offset.

*Fourthly*, developing a biodiversity offset management program as part of the Environmental Management Plan in EIA to assist project managers in organizing and implementing activities necessary to achieve offset goal, reducing the risk of failure, as well as in detailing the monitoring program so that the offset goal can be managed effectively.

*Finally*, landscape impact assessment, biodiversity impact assessment and biodiversity offset are recognized to have important socio-economic significance and required an integrated approach between the natural and socioeconomic fields, however, it is still a newly developed issue. Therefore, it is necessary to invest resources and strengthen international cooperation to study, develop and issue technical guidelines for integrating landscape impact assessment and biodiversity impact assessment in SEA and EIA processes and procedures in Vietnam.