

Responding to global environmental issues like biodiversity loss and climate change challenge national governments and intergovernmental bodies. A conventional response has been to set targets. Yet to achieve targets, governments must implement effective policies. Indicators that track policy implementation could provide information on individual country progress towards targets and for international benchmarking. We take up a recommendation from Convention on Biological Diversity mandated experts to develop a policy indicator(s) for biodiversity. This expert group identified four indicator attributes: identification, establishment, strengthening and assessment. We review biodiversity (and climate change) policies implemented in the period 1952–2012 in 54 nations using an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) database. We find: the number of countries implementing biodiversity policies increased steadily until the end of the 2000s (identification); evidence of continuous innovation in the types of policy instruments implemented (establishment); and evidence of policy revision and shifts in jurisdiction (strengthening). To overcome a lack of data to evaluate policy effectiveness (assessment) we suggest improvements in data collection and the possibility to combine the OECD database with other databases.