

Implementation of Target 1 of the EU biodiversity strategy to 2020

This document provides an update on progress in implementing Target 1 of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 since the last ND meeting of 24/25 April 2014.

Action 1: Complete the establishment of the Natura 2000 network, incl. in the marine, and ensure good management

Preparations are currently ongoing with regard to the update of 6 out of the 9 **Union lists of Sites of Community Importance**: Alpine, Atlantic, Boreal, Continental, Mediterranean and Pannonian. These updates are based on the information on Natura 2000 sites that Member states submitted to the Commission until February 2014. The Habitats Committee meeting of 15 October voted in favour of the Commission decisions adopting these 6 Union Lists.

This update of the Union Lists will add another 2.2 million hectares to the network of SCIs under the Habitats Directive, which corresponds to EU-wide increase by 2.9% compared to last year. The total number of SCIs is now 23 642 (+ 3.6% compared to last year). The most important share of this increase is a result of the EU accession of Croatia. However, several other Member State also added substantial areas to their network of SCIs (notably Finland, Slovenia, Italy, UK, France and Austria).

As regards commitments made by Nature Directors at their last meeting to accelerate efforts in order to address insufficiencies, especially in **offshore** areas, further marine site designations have been recently announced, especially by Spain and Bulgaria. The current state of play with marine N2000 designations was presented at the last meeting of the Marine Expert Group end October 2014. The Commission is closely following up on the implementation of the legal obligations to designate SCIs as **SACs** and establish the necessary conservation measures, including through the launching of the necessary legal procedures against those MS with a clear implementation deficit.

The development of **fisheries measures** for Natura 2000 sites under the new Common Fisheries Policy was explicitly addressed at the last meeting of the Nature Directors who, in their conclusions (also shared by the water/marine Directors), stressed the need for strengthened and joint approaches between environment and fisheries authorities when preparing such measures. The Commission (DG ENV and DG MARE) is currently preparing an updated guidance note on the implementation of the relevant provisions of the CFP which was presented at the last meeting of the Marine Expert Group in October 2014.

As regards the **Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process**, the kick-off Natura 2000 Seminar for the Mediterranean region took place in Thessaloniki from 26 to 28 May 2014. The Seminar was hosted by the Axios, Loudios and Aliakmonas Delta Management Authority, in close cooperation with the Greek Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Climate Change and the European Commission. The seminar report is available on the Natura 2000 Communication Platform:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/platform/index_en.htm. The kick-off Natura 2000 Seminar for the Continental, Pannonian, Black-Sea and Steppic regions is now planned to take place in Luxembourg from 29 June to 1 July 2015. It will be hosted by the Luxembourg Ministry for sustainable development and infrastructure.

Several follow-up events of the Boreal, Atlantic and Alpine seminars have been organised in 2014. For details please consult the Natura 2000 Platform.

The marine biogeographic process will be launched in 2015 with a kick-off seminar to be organised by France on 5-7 May 2015. The seminar will cover all marine regions and details about its set up and scope were discussed at the last meeting of the Marine Expert Group of October 30-31.

This meeting of the **Marine Expert Group** also discussed the final document on sensitivity analysis of fishery impacts, a first draft note on applying Art. 6 to fisheries, the updated note on introducing fisheries measures under the new CFP, and the progress of work in relation to MPAs under MSFD.

Work on **coordinated implementation of water/marine/nature/biodiversity** legislation and policy is progressing and a joint workshop is scheduled for 2-3 December 2014. Invitations to the respective coordination groups have been sent out and a background document is currently under preparation for the participants.

Action 2: Ensure adequate financing of Natura 2000 sites

See also the separate document on financing biodiversity and nature.

The Nature Unit has been receiving updated prioritised action frameworks (**PAFs**) reflecting the expected outcomes of the OP negotiations and/or updated Natura 2000 cost calculations as well as adjusted conservation priorities and conservation measures. Some other Member States expressed interest/plans to update their PAFs in the near future. The Commission encourages the MS to update their PAFs so that they present the most recent knowledge on management of the national Natura 2000 networks and reflect the allocation of funding priorities in the various OPs. This is particularly important in the context of LIFE integrated projects which will have to be based on the PAFs and aim at their full implementation. The MS which still have not submitted their PAFs are strongly encouraged to do so.

The **contract on improving the uptake of funds for Natura 2000** has come to an end. It resulted in publication of the new "Guidance Handbook on financing Natura 2000" which is available on the DG Environment webpage.¹ The Handbook has a two-part structure: [part I is the description of EU funding opportunities in 2014-2020](#) and [part II is the analysis of Natura](#)

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/financing/index_en.htm#guidancehandbook

[2000 management measures eligible for financing together with case studies](#). 24 Natura 2000 financing seminars have also been organised within the frame of the contract. These meetings gathered in total more than a thousand participants. The seminars have been successful in identifying the strategic needs for financing nature protection and discussing ways of allocating resources for this purpose.

A new Commission **State Aid** General Block Exemptions Regulation was adopted providing under certain conditions a general block exemption to state aids in favour of the Natural Heritage. This was presented in more detail in a document to the last CGBN meeting.

Action 3: Increase stakeholder awareness and involvement and improve enforcement

The first, inaugural year of the European **Natura 2000 Award**, aiming to bring the success of the network to the public's attention and to demonstrate its importance for protecting biodiversity across Europe and to give recognition to people engaged with management of the network, is now over and proved to be a very successful and highly appreciated initiative. In the 5 categories we have received in total 163 applications from which an independent team of evaluators created a short list of 22 candidates. This short list has been presented to a high level jury to select the winners. The names of the 5 winners were announced at a prestigious Award ceremony in Brussels on 21 May 2014. None of the 22 finalists knew beforehand who would step up to take the prizes in the five award categories. Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik presented the awards, joined by the five jury members and other leading nature conservation experts.

The Conservation Award went to a project for saving the imperial eagle in Sakar in Bulgaria, where thanks to the work of the project team and the cooperation between conservationists and private companies, the local population of this globally threatened species has been brought back from close to extinction. A project in Sighiș oara-Târnava Mare in Romania won the Socio-Economic Benefits Award, with an impressive example of Natura 2000 providing economic growth and sustainable livelihoods in rural areas. The Communication Award goes to Raná-Hrádek in the Czech Republic for promoting the protection of dry grassland habitats in the Louny region. The Reconciling Interests/Perceptions Award went to a project in the Vijvergebied van Midden Limburg site in Belgium. The Networking & Cross-Border Cooperation Award goes to a technical cooperation network in Spain for developing quality standards for management and a reference website on the state of the Natura 2000 network in Spain.

The ceremony was a tribute to the hard work and dedication that goes into managing Natura 2000 sites across Europe, and offered inspiration and an excellent networking opportunity for all those taking part. More information about the winners, the ceremony and the first, inaugural year of the Natura 2000 Award are available on the Award website:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/awards/index_en.htm. Currently, with the support of the Commission, the 5 winners are organizing local events in order to promote the Natura 2000 and the great awarded achievements among the local people, local authorities, decision makers and media. The Commission, based on the experience gained during the first year is now discussing with the contractor some improvements, including establishing of a

new category “Citizen’s award”, where people could directly vote for a candidate. With establishing this category and increasing the use of social media we expect to increase the awareness about Natura 2000 among general public. The call for applications for the new 2015 Award will soon be announced at the award website.

Guidance documents

Work has continued on the development of a guidance document on **Natura 2000 and forests**. Currently, a quite elaborated draft of the guidance document has been prepared thanks to very constructive participation of all the members of a specific working group representing Member States authorities and the various sectors and NGOs most concerned in the matter. The current draft reflects much of the working group’s discussions and it highlights the opportunities for both the forest and the nature conservation community to develop new synergies through confidence building, mutual understanding and cooperation. The guidance will now undergo a consultation within the Commission services and will be circulated for comments to the members of the Expert Group on the Birds and Habitats Directives (Habitats Committee) and to the members of the Standing Forestry Committee. In spring 2015, the final draft guidance document will be submitted to the Expert Group on the Birds and Habitats Directives (Habitats Committee) and the Standing Forestry Committee for endorsement so that the final document can be published before the summer of 2015.

The new **guidance document on Natura 2000 and agriculture** has been published on the Nature & Biodiversity Website:

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/docs/FARMING%20FOR%20NATURA%202000-final%20guidance.pdf>

On **Natura 2000 and Hydropower**, further work has to be done in the next weeks with the Commission consultant before a draft can be submitted for comments to the relevant stakeholders. The guidance document on **Energy Infrastructure** should be published soon, after completion of inter-service consultation.

A draft updated version of the general **Article 6 interpretation** document has been presented to the last meeting of the Expert Group on the Birds and Habitats Directives on 15/10/2014. The update draws primarily on relevant recent Court rulings as well as other developments (Commission notes on Natura 2000 management, sector specific guidance documents). Following the receipt of comments, a new version will be presented to the next meeting of the group for endorsement and then publication by Commission services will follow.

Species protection esp Large Carnivores

As part of the DG ENV’s EU **Large Carnivore Initiative**, the **EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores** was launched on 10 June, 2014. Under the auspices of Commissioner Janez Potocnik, high-level representatives of eight key European stakeholder organizations representing farmers, livestock producers including reindeer-herders, landowners, hunters and game managers, protected area managers, conservation NGOs and scientists signed an agreement stating the key principles of engagement in the Platform. This new structure aims to facilitate a constructive dialogue among umbrella organizations and their members to exchange experience, and to find

commonly agreed solutions to conflicts with large carnivores. The Platform held its first working meeting after the launch when the European Landowners' Organization was elected to co-chair the Platform with the Commission for the first two years of its operation. The Terms of Reference of the Platform were agreed and elements of a work plan for the initial period were discussed. Detailed information may be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/coexistence_platform.htm

Also as part of the EU Large Carnivore Initiative, a set of documents describing key actions for four species of large carnivores in Europe, including at the population level, are being finalized and will be posted in the coming weeks on the large carnivores webpage of DG ENV. These documents have been prepared with the help of a large team of experts on the conservation and management of large carnivores in Europe, with the aim of providing a set of recommendations about the most urgently needed actions that could be taken up by a variety of stakeholders. The drafts of these documents have gone through an extensive consultation process with a large range of stakeholders, first at a workshop held in December, 2013. The Member State authorities were consulted on revised drafts at the last meeting of the Habitats Committee (29 April, 2014) and some MS have sent written comments afterwards. Member States and different stakeholders are invited to examine the key actions described in these documents, and to follow up on any of them that they consider relevant for the given population(s) of their concern, and for which they have the capacity and resources to act.

A set of pilot actions on large carnivores are also being carried out in the frame of an ongoing contract,

1. Exploring traditional husbandry methods to reduce wolf predation on free-ranging cattle in the Iberian Peninsula
2. Defining, preventing, and reacting to problem bear behaviour in the Alps
3. Engaging hunters and other stakeholders in joint large-carnivore monitoring activities in the Northern Carpathians
4. A communication project (video for online distribution and virtual photo gallery) focusing on the usefulness for damage prevention as well as the cultural heritage value of shepherding systems with livestock guarding dogs, shepherds and enclosures.

Further information will be available by the finalization of these projects by the end of 2014:

At the last meeting of the Expert Group on the Habitats and Birds Directives **other species protection issues** were discussed, such as on Cormorants, on the development of a multi-species action plan on bats, a LIFE preparatory action on multi-species action plan for wet meadow birds, and a species action plan on the Greater Spotted Eagle and the issue of the potential threat of Diclofenac to vultures. The meeting also had a first discussion of preparing possible criteria for the application of Article 7 of the Birds Directives in particular as regards the hunting of Annex 2 species which have unhealthy or declining populations.

Improving enforcement

The Commission is actively engaged with IMPEL in implementing actions to improve enforcement of EU nature legislation. Some activities have been undertaken to **combat illegal killing of birds** and to improve **compliance with permits for projects on Natura 2000**

sites. A meeting with **IMPEL** partners at the end of November 2014 will assess these activities and suggest follow up.

The Commission presented at the last meeting of the Expert Group on the Habitats and Birds Directives a document compiling rulings of the European Court of Justice related to Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. At the last meeting of the CGBN, 2 major **ECJ preliminary reference judgements** were presented, dealing with the declassification of Natura 2000 sites² and the difference between mitigation and compensation measures in Articles 6.3. and 6.4. of the Habitats Directive³.

Action 4: Reporting under the Habitats and Birds Directives

The 6-yearly reporting on progress under the nature directives has been streamlined and re-focused on status of species and habitats over the last years. The reporting round 2013 is now in its analysis phase. The reporting is a major input in measuring progress in approaching biodiversity targets set out in the 2020 Biodiversity Strategy.

After receipt of the national reports, the EEA and its Topic Centre on Biological Diversity produced the following first products:

- National summaries with overview statistics for each Member State
- A web tool to view easily the assessments of Member States as well as the EU-biogeographic assessments by species and habitats under Art.17. Art.17 tool: <http://art17.eionet.europa.eu/article17/reports2012/> and Art.12 tool: <http://bd.eionet.europa.eu/article12/>

A paper setting out the method on how to assess progress towards Target 1 of the 2020 Biodiversity Strategy has been finalised in spring.

First statistics based purely on the Art.17 national reports were presented to the last CGBN in March 2014. First statistics on the EU-biogeographic assessments under Art.17 and statistics on national data under Art.12 were presented to the last Expert Group on the Birds and Habitats Directives mid-October.

The Commission plans to issue in April 2014 a 'State of Nature in the EU' report on implementation of Article 17 Habitats Directive and Article 12 Birds Directive. This will be accompanied by the simultaneous launch of a more detailed technical report by the European Environment Agency on the same topic.

Fitness check of EU Nature Legislation

The Study Contract to assist the Commission with collecting and assessing the information and evidence to address the questions set out in the fitness check has now been established. This will run for 15 months. Within the framework of this contract the following key tasks are envisaged:

² Case C-301/12 Cascina Tre Pini Ss v Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Tutela del Territorio e le Mare and Others – Judgment – preliminary reference – Nature – Dir 92/43/EEC – 03/04/2014

³ C-521/12 TC Briels – 267 Judgment – preliminary reference – Nature – Dir 92/43/EEC – 15/05/2014

- *To carry out a review of relevant available information and evidence in a way that allows for its presentation and assessment according to each of the questions of the fitness check*
- *To undertake consultation with all Member States and with key stakeholder group, ensuring that at least the competent authorities responsible for EU nature legislation, another sectoral public authority, a relevant NGO and private body are consulted in each*
- *To examine in more detail the situation regarding the experience and lessons learnt in implementation of the nature legislation in 10 representative Member States*
- *To prepare for public consultation by internet to get the views of citizens and civil society*
- *To carry out a systematic and comprehensive assessment and synthesis of the available relevant evidence and information from reviews and consultations, aimed at addressing as far as possible each of the questions posed for different categories of the fitness check*
- *To prepare a draft evaluation report, the main findings of which will be presented at a dedicated workshop towards the end of the study*
- *Having regard to the feedback at this workshop in Brussels to finalise the evaluation report for the fitness check*

First contacts with Member States and key stakeholders should therefore start beginning of 2015. As explained at the last CGBN it is proposed that the key focal point for contact with the MS will be the Habitats Committee representatives, unless the MS informs the Commission that they have nominated another focal point. The objective will be to maintain close contact with the nature authorities in the MS throughout the exercise.

The selection of 10 Member States for more detailed evidence gathering will aim to ensure a balance of size, geography, different administrative structures and older and newer Member States. The selection will also be informed by the feedback received during the earlier stakeholder consultation phase. The public internet consultation is likely to take place in the second quarter of 2015.

The EU assessment of Article 17 Habitats Directive and Article 12 Birds Directive national reports, foreseen for April 2015, will provide a key input to the process, especially in relation to questions concerning the effectiveness of the Directives.

Whereas there should be opportunities for discussion on issues relevant to the fitness check at Green Week 2015 a dedicated workshop or conference is foreseen for later in autumn 2015 to allow sufficient time for compiling the information and evidence and presenting this to Member States and stakeholders.

The Commission aims to report on the findings of the Fitness Check in early 2016.