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Editorial

We share this planet with an extraordinary diversity of nature which is a source of inspiration, knowledge, recreation and tourism and an important part of our cultural heritage. Nature is also vital for our health and our wealth and can play a key role in creating jobs and stimulating new investments. We depend on it for the food, energy, raw materials, air and water that make life possible and drive the economy. As European Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Policy and Fisheries I am committed to ensuring that the protection of nature and maintaining Europe's competitiveness go hand-in-hand.

2015 will be a very important year for nature and biodiversity policy in the EU. On 4 March I will, together with the European Environment Agency Director, present the State of the Environment Report 2015. This report, which is published every five years, gives a very clear outline of the environmental realities faced across the European Union. In 2010, the previous report helped set the European environmental agenda for the next five years, and it is our expectation that the new report will help us do the same.

The mid-term review of the EU biodiversity strategy will assess progress towards meeting the 2020 target of halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. This will help ensure that the EU is on track to achieve its biodiversity objectives in 2020. There will also be a need to ensure full implementation of the new EU Regulation on Invasive Alien Species, which addresses one of the major threats to biodiversity in the EU and came into force in January.

Another key priority for 2015 is the Fitness Check of the Birds and Habitats Directives which will involve a comprehensive evidence-based evaluation of the implementation of the two Directives. It will examine opportunities for improving implementation and reducing administrative burden without lowering the protection standards provided by the legislation. Recognising the importance that many people attach to this legislation, the Commission will carry out this evaluation in a thorough and transparent manner, in consultation with Member States and key stakeholder groups. A public internet consultation will also be launched in spring, giving civil society an opportunity to provide input on the subject.

Over the next five years, I will work towards strengthening the integration of nature and biodiversity policy into other key policy sectors. As my responsibilities also relate to maritime and fisheries policies, I intend to pay particular attention to ensuring that the Common Fisheries Policy, Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Blue Growth initiative and EU Nature legislation all work together towards the same objective: that of making Europe's seas healthy and productive.

Finally, Green Week 2015 will focus on the theme of 'Nature, our health, our wealth'. This will be a good opportunity to showcase how nature and biodiversity contribute to sustaining our economy, and to improving the quality of life of European citizens. I hope to see you there.

Karmenu Vella
Commissioner Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries



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Cover: Grey seal, *Halichoerus grypus*, amongst seaweeds, Lundy Island, Devon, England.

© Alex Mustard / naturepl.com



Harlequin ladybird, Harmonia axyridis, is an invasive species from Asia. It out-competes native ladybirds and other non-pest insects, causing a reduction in native biodiversity.

Tackling invasive alien species

A coordinated EU response

On 4 November 2014, the European Union published a landmark Regulation to prevent, minimise and mitigate the adverse impacts of Invasive Alien Species (IAS) on Europe's biodiversity. This is a major step forward in achieving the EU's ambitious biodiversity targets for 2020.

It is estimated that over 12,000 alien species have found their way into the EU already, either by accident or through their deliberate introduction. Around 10–15% have since reproduced and spread across the EU, and are now considered invasive.

In addition to being one of the major sources of biodiversity loss and species extinction in the EU, and indeed in the world, invasive alien species also cause significant economic and social damage, for instance

in areas such as healthcare and infrastructure damage, as well as in terms of reduced crop yields and fish stocks etc. Altogether, they are estimated to cost the European economy over €12 billion per year, with this figure growing all the time.

Although several existing EU Directives and Regulations had already partially addressed certain aspects of the IAS problem, for instance in the field of plant and animal health, they were insufficient to address the problem in a comprehensive manner. The new Regulation aims to close this important policy gap.

The need for a coordinated EU response

The benefits of having a coordinated Europe-wide response to invasive alien species are self evident. By

working together, we have a much greater chance of addressing the problem effectively. It also avoids situations where the efforts of one Member State to manage an invasive alien species are undone by the lack of action from neighbouring countries.

Action at EU level also makes sound economic sense. Member States can share information, cooperate in the development of risk assessments that are valid for the entire Union and set up joint management actions to eradicate or contain invasive alien species. This should, in turn, improve efficiency and lead to considerable cost savings.

Invasive alien species of Union concern

The new EU Regulation, which came into force on 1 January, is structured around three main



pillars: prevention; early warning and rapid response to newly establishing IAS; and management of already established IAS.

At its core is a list of invasive alien species of Union concern, which the Commission will develop, on the basis of objective criteria and risk assessments, in close collaboration with a Standing Committee made up of Member State representatives.

The purpose of this list is to enable Member States to focus on those species whose impact has been recognised as being so negative that they require concerted action at Union level.

The risk assessments will address the following elements, using the best available scientific evidence:

- the ability of an alien species to establish a viable population;
- reproduction and spread patterns;
- current distribution and potential range;
- risk of entry, establishment and spread;
- negative impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem services; magnitude of potential impacts; damage costs; and
- uses and socio-economic benefits linked to the species.

Prevention

The first list of invasive alien species of Union concern should be proposed to the Member States by the end of this year. Once this list enters into force, all species on the list will effectively be banned from entering intentionally into the EU and it will not be possible to deliberately trade, keep, breed, or release them into the European Union. Customs authorities will be mandated to carry out controls at all of the Union borders, and will have the power to seize any shipments that do not conform.

Some exceptions will be possible for duly justified reasons, such as research and *ex-situ* conservation, but only on condition that the competent authority in the Member States concerned has issued a permit to that effect and that certain conditions are respected, such as keeping the specimens in closed facilities.

Member States will also be entitled to take emergency measures for any species that are not on the Union list but for which they have reason to believe their presence will cause significant ecological and/or economic damage on their territory.

LIFE projects helping to tackle IAS

- The LIFE programme provides a testing ground for actions aimed at tackling IAS. Between 1992 and 2013, a total of 265 LIFE projects included measures dealing with IAS.
- Invasive alien terrestrial plants such as black cherry *Prunus serotina*, black locust *Robinia pseudoacacia* and tree of heaven *Ailanthus altissima* have been targeted by more than half of the projects concerned with eradication and management of IAS. The next largest category concerns invasive predators, such as the American mink *Mustela vison* and rats.
- To date, the overwhelming majority of LIFE projects have focused on the eradication and management of already existing IAS. However, some projects are also starting to address the need to prevent invasions in the first place, and develop early warning and rapid response systems. In this context, the new LIFE Regulation (2014–2020) provides increased opportunities for tackling all aspects of IAS in line with the new IAS Regulation.

In such cases the Member State in question will need to inform the Commission and other relevant Member States of its actions, so that the latter can react accordingly and, if appropriate, eventually endorse the inclusion of that species on the list of IAS of Union concern. The Member State initiating the measures will be required to submit a risk assessment within 24 months.

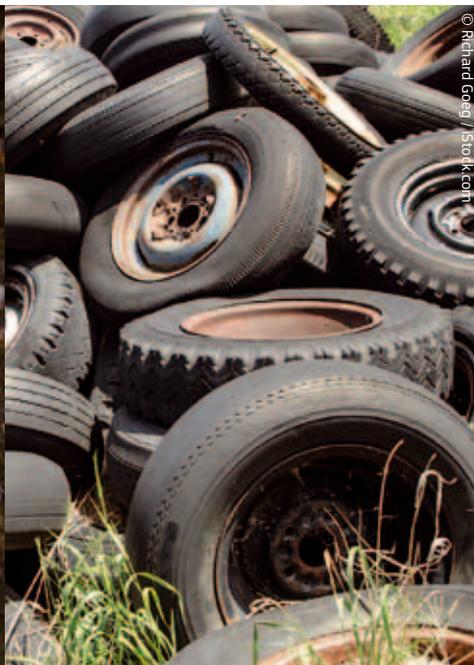
Tackling unintentional introductions

Whilst some invasive alien species have been introduced intentionally for commercial

use or private interest (e.g. ornamental plants or exotic pets), many others have come in by accident, either as 'contaminants' on tradable commodities or as 'hitchhikers' on various forms of transport or equipment originating from other regions of the world (e.g. used tyres, ships' ballast). Because of the sheer number of different pathways used, tackling the problem of unintentional introductions is particularly difficult.

The EU Regulation calls on Member States to carry out, within 18 months from the time of entry into force of the first list

Invasive alien species have entered the EU on the hulls of ships, in used tyres and as contaminants in seed mixes.



of IAS of Union concern, a comprehensive analysis of the pathways of unintentional introduction and spread of IAS of Union concern in their territory, be they on land or at sea. This is intended to help identify the pathways requiring priority action – so called ‘priority pathways’.

Each Member State will then need to establish and implement, within three years from the time of the entry into force of the first list, a single action plan (or set of action plans) to address these priority pathways. In addition to describing legal measures the action plans may also include voluntary actions, codes of good practice and public awareness campaigns where appropriate.

Early detection and rapid eradication

The second component of the new proposal focuses on early detection and rapid eradication. It requires each Member State to establish an official surveillance system, within 18 months of the adoption of the first Union list, to collect and record key data on IAS of Union concern in their territory.

These surveillance systems should enable a Member State to notify the Commission and the other Member States as soon as a newly established IAS of Union concern has been detected. That way immediate action can be taken to eradicate the IAS early on before it has had a chance to spread and cause significant damage, provided that such eradication is both feasible and the associated costs are not disproportionate to the benefits of eradication.

The surveillance system will also allow countries to share valuable experiences on the various management techniques that have been developed for the eradication or management of different invasive alien species.

Managing existing IAS

The final element of the new proposal deals with the



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Preventing the spread of invasive alien species can be both costly and time-consuming.

A European Alien Species Information Network (EASIN)

A strong knowledge base is essential for underpinning efficient and scientifically-justified decision-making. To assist the Member States in their tasks, the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) has set up a European Alien Species Information Network, (EASIN), which provides a single interface for existing databases on IAS.

Through dynamically updated web features, users can view their distribution in Europe using a number of selection criteria ranging from the environment in which they are found (terrestrial, marine or fresh water) and their biological classification through to the pathways of their introduction. Further webtools will be added in due course.

<http://easin.jrc.ec.europa.eu>

management of IAS of Union concern that are already well established in one or more Member States.

Based on a cost-benefit analysis, each country will be required to put in place a series of measures to control and contain their IAS populations of Union concern – or eradicate them completely if this is still possible – so that their ecological and economic impacts can be minimised. When applying such measures to invasive animals, Member States must ensure that the methods used are humane.

Member States are also encouraged to coordinate their

management programmes across national borders where this is likely to lead to a more efficient and cost-effective solution for all concerned. In addition, they should take appropriate measures to restore the habitats damaged or destroyed by IAS in order to assist their recovery and prevent any subsequent reinvasions.

A measured approach

In conclusion, the new EU Regulation offers a comprehensive framework for addressing the ever-increasing problem of IAS in Europe. But, as it is a new policy area for the

EU, it also advocates a measured approach that will enable the system to be developed gradually, giving the Commission and Member States an opportunity to learn from experience, and ensure the new system is entirely ‘fit for purpose’.

Its flexible framework also allows Member States to continue with more stringent measures wherever they feel this is appropriate, as long as those are compatible with the Union Treaty.

For more information go to:
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/invasivealien/index_en.htm

The Birds and Habitats Directives

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fitness check

The EU's REFIT Programme

In 2010, the European Commission announced its intention to work towards a new agenda for smart regulation. This is a continuous process, affecting the whole policy cycle – from the design of a piece of legislation, to implementation, enforcement, evaluation and, where justified, revision.

Within this process, evaluation is a key, retrospective exercise, which assesses what

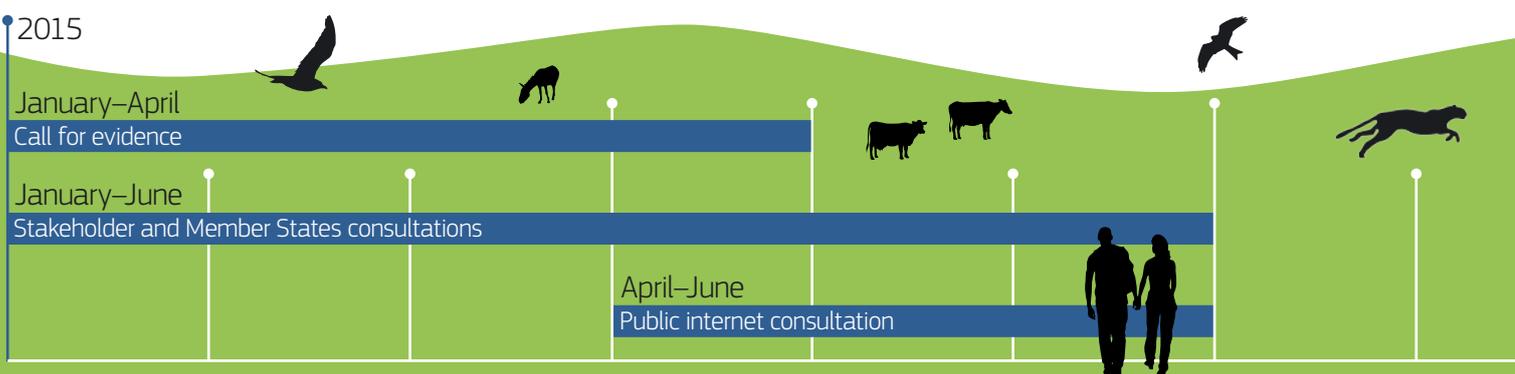
has happened and looks at what caused any change, and how much might reasonably be credited to EU action. It provides an evidence-based critical analysis of whether EU actions are proportionate to their objectives and delivering as expected.

Under the Commission's Regulatory Fitness and Performance Programme (REFIT), adopted in December 2012, the Commission reviewed the entire stock of EU legislation and proposed four categories of

follow-up actions, one of which is a 'fitness check' involving a comprehensive policy evaluation aimed at assessing whether the regulatory framework for a particular policy sector is 'fit for purpose'.

All bigger, multiple pieces of legislation, such as the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, have been automatically selected for fitness checks. The experience to date with fitness checks has not been on scaling back on environmental objectives but

Indicative timetable for the Birds and Habitats Directives fitness check.



rather about achieving them more efficiently.

The fitness check

As a first step, the Commission developed a mandate for the fitness check on the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. Published in February 2014, this defines the overall scope and aim of the exercise, and sets out a number of key questions that are to be addressed in relation to each of the fitness check criteria (see below).

Since the fitness check requires an evidence-based approach covering all environmental, economic and social aspects in relation to the two nature directives, the Commission launched a study contract, in October 2014, to assist in the gathering and assessment of relevant information and evidence of implementation and integration achievements and problems from different sources at both EU and Member State level.

The study will be guided by a Commission Steering Group made up of representatives of different policy sectors within the European Commission, and will, in addition, provide support for extensive consultation with all Member States and key stakeholders.

A key input to the fitness check will be the Commission's *State of Nature in the EU* report, based on Member States' conservation status assessments of the species and habitat types protected by the two nature directives, due in

April. The mid-term view of the Biodiversity Strategy, foreseen for later this year, will also provide further evidence-based information.

EU-wide consultation

In the spirit of openness and transparency, the fitness check will involve an extensive consultation exercise with all Member States and key stakeholder groups during the first half of this year to gather the necessary evidence. In addition, there will be a 12-week public internet consultation starting in April to offer an opportunity to civil society to provide their opinions on the subject.

A high-level conference on the fitness check is planned for late September. This will allow the draft results of the evaluation to be shared with Member States and key stakeholders before finalising the evaluation by the end of this year.

Final outcome

Thereafter, the Commission will publish the results of the fitness check, foreseen as a Staff Working Paper, in early 2016. The results of the fitness check will provide a solid basis for any future policy considerations in relation to EU nature legislation.

How can you contribute?

In January, the Commission will publish a list of key documents that will be consulted for the evidence-based analysis. If you consider that a major publication or review from

Focus of the exercise

The fitness check is intended to provide answers on the different aspects of the two nature directives in terms of their:

- **EFFECTIVENESS** (e.g. have the objectives been met? What progress has been made to date; are these in line with initial expectations? Which main factors have contributed to, or stood in the way of, achieving these objectives? What is the contribution of the directives towards ensuring biodiversity in Europe?)
- **EFFICIENCY** (e.g. what are the costs and benefits associated with compliance with the Directives? If there are significant cost differences between Member States, what is causing them? Are the costs of compliance proportionate to the benefits brought by the directives? Are availability and access to funding a constraint or support in the implementation of the directives?)
- **RELEVANCE** (e.g. are the key problems facing species and habitats of EU conservation concern still addressed? How relevant are the directives to achieving sustainable development? How relevant is EU nature legislation to EU citizens and what is their level of support for it?)
- **COHERENCE** (e.g. to what extent are the directives satisfactorily integrated and coherent with other parts of EU environmental law/policy? To what extent do the directives complement or interact with other EU sectoral policies? To what extent do they support the creation of a level playing field for economic operators?)
- **EU ADDED VALUE** (e.g. what has been the EU added value and what would be the likely situation had there not been EU nature legislation?)

your country or sector has not been included, there will be an opportunity to make a proposal for its inclusion. You are also invited to respond to the public consultation which will be published on the Commission's website in early April.

Regular updates of the fitness check will be posted on DG Environment's special website: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/fitness_check/index_en.htm

September
High-level
conference

October–December
Finalise evaluation study

2016

January–March
Commission report on fitness check



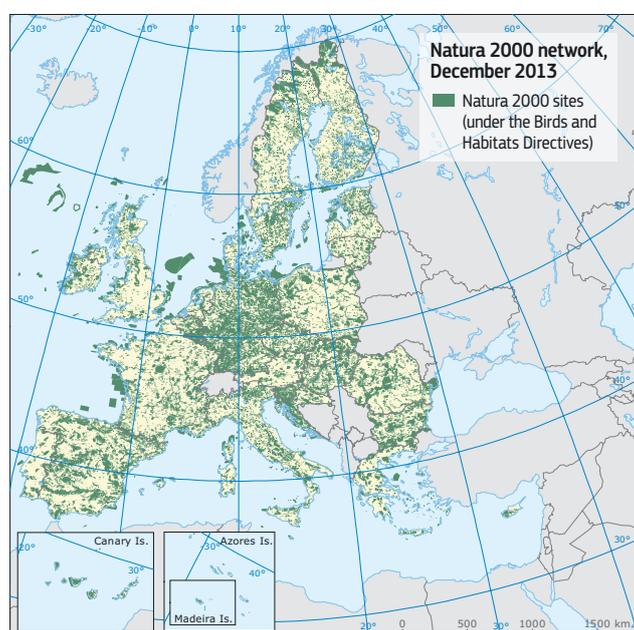
natura 2000 barometer

Member States	NATURA 2000 SITES (SPAs + SCIs)			TERRESTRIAL				
	Total N° Natura 2000 sites	Total area in Natura 2000 (km ²)	% land area covered by Natura 2000	Total area SCI (km ²)	N° SCIs	Total area SPA (km ²)	N° SPAs	
BELGIË/BELGIQUE	457	5 155.58	12.73%	3 065.86	278	2 964.61	231	
BULGARIA	340	41 048.10	34.46%	33 258.06	230	25 226.06	119	
ČESKÁ REPUBLIKA	1 116	11 061.20	14.03%	7 855.61	1 075	7 034.73	41	
DANMARK	350	22 646.54	8.34%	3 177.78	218	2 605.18	97	
DEUTSCHLAND	5 252	80 759.17	15.45%	33 487.19	4 577	40 245.08	730	
EESTI	568	14 832.68	17.86%	7 666.69	533	6 157.43	62	
ÉIRE/IRELAND	594	19 454.72	13.13%	7 163.96	403	4 311.35	141	
ELLÁDA	419	42 946.17	27.09%	21 388.24	226	27 622.04	201	
ESPAÑA	1 863	209 121.50	27.23%	116 998.26	1 359	100 895.85	580	
FRANCE	1 754	111 115.07	12.64%	47 192.59	1 309	43 366.39	352	
HRVATSKA	780	25 953.56	36.53%	15 997.91	539	17 036.30	38	
ITALIA	2 589	63 892.71	18.97%	42 807.17	2 204	40 108.15	603	
KÝPROS*	61	1 759.78	28.39%	752.27	37	1 482.66	29	
LATVIJA	333	11 833.18	11.53%	7 418.14	323	6 609.39	93	
LIETUVA	480	8 926.31	12.15%	6 137.52	403	5 525.79	80	
LUXEMBOURG	60	470.86	18.13%	414.80	49	141.18	13	
MAGYARORSZÁG	525	19 948.51	21.44%	14 442.23	479	13 746.58	56	
MALTA	39	233.72	13.08%	40.68	28	13.17	13	
NEDERLAND	194	17 311.90	13.29%	3 133.61	133	4 765.78	73	
ÖSTERREICH	240	12 615.86	15.04%	9 114.85	192	10 167.88	99	
POLSKA	987	68 400.72	19.56%	33 849.35	847	48 394.14	141	
PORTUGAL	149	21 628.44	20.65%	15 480.66	89	9 200.51	56	
ROMÂNIA	531	55 674.44	22.56%	39 765.43	375	35 347.94	147	
SLOVENIJA	354	7 684.29	37.85%	6 635.57	323	5 067.68	29	
SLOVENSKO	514	14 442.27	29.57%	5 837.12	473	13 106.18	41	
SUOMI	1 839	55 987.65	14.45%	48 556.49	1 666	24 655.45	449	
SVERIGE	4 072	66 738.57	13.84%	56 905.28	3 928	25 330.76	530	
UNITED KINGDOM	924	94 966.63	8.53%	13 090.40	592	16 002.63	244	
EU28	27 384	1 106 610.13	18.14%	601 633.72	22 888	537 130.89	5 288	

* The area and % of territory corresponds to the area of Cyprus where the Community acquis applies at present, according to protocol 10 of the Accession Treaty of Cyprus.

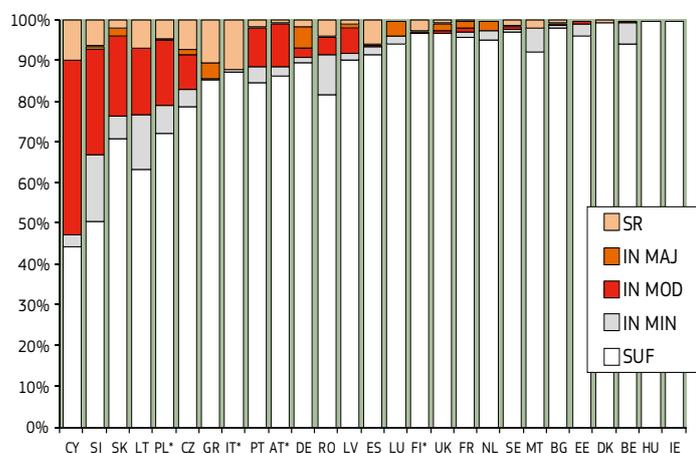
The **Natura Barometer** is managed by DG ENV with the technical assistance of the European Environment Agency and is based on information officially transmitted by Member States until December 2014. The Natura 2000 network includes sites designated according to the Birds Directive (SPAs) and the Habitats Directive (SCIs). Both site types frequently often overlap, either in their entirety or partially. The figures relating to the total number of Natura 2000 sites (i.e. SPAs + SCIs) and their area coverage have been obtained by GIS analysis. In order to eliminate possible overlaps between the two. The methodology used has recently been refined, which explains why many of the figures are slightly different from the previous Barometer updates.

NB Sites having a terrestrial component covering more than 5% of their total area are counted as terrestrial sites whilst sites having a marine component covering more than 5% of their total area are counted as marine sites. Coastal sites with a marine area covering more than 5% but less than 95% of the total site are counted as both terrestrial and marine sites.



update 2014

		MARINE						Member States
Total area Natura 2000 (km ²)	Total N° Natura sites on land	Total area SCI (km ²)	N° SCIs	Total area SPA (km ²)	N° SPAs	Total area Marine Natura 2000 (km ²)	Total N° Marine Natura sites	
3 884.81	453	1 127.01	3	318.14	4	1 270.77	7	BELGIUM
38 221.55	336	2 482.23	16	550.33	11	2 826.55	26	BULGARIA
1 1061.2	1 116	0	0	0	0	0	0	CZECH REPUBLIC
3 593.75	294	16 492.08	101	12 183.56	57	19 052.79	150	DENMARK
55 157.61	5 216	20 935.45	69	19 718.31	28	25 601.56	93	GERMANY
8 078.41	557	3 883.94	55	6 479.51	26	6 754.27	62	ESTONIA
9 227.15	544	9 755.13	133	1 583.37	95	10 227.57	228	IRELAND
35 747.40	403	6 689.40	96	1 904.85	66	7 198.77	152	GREECE
137 444.01	1 706	40 553.66	253	52 059.73	141	71 677.49	343	SPAIN
69 417.93	1 661	27 877.15	144	35 543.01	81	41 697.14	225	FRANCE
20 673.35	577	4 960.66	257	1 106.07	9	5 280.21	266	CROATIA
57 172.16	2 483	5 633.13	319	4 005.26	90	6 720.55	363	ITALY
1 628.53	58	131.09	6	110.40	4	131.25	8	CYPRUS*
7 445.81	326	2 663.69	7	4 279.91	6	4 387.37	8	LATVIA
7 932.78	484	527.42	4	739.39	5	993.53	9	LITHUANIA
470.86	60	0	0	0	0	0	0	LUXEMBOURG
19 948.51	525	0	0	0	0	0	0	HUNGARY
41.32	35	192.33	16	3.42	9	192.40	22	MALTA
5 517.22	187	11 673.38	14	5 735.93	10	11 794.68	18	THE NETHERLANDS
12 615.86	240	0	0	0	0	0	0	AUSTRIA
61 164.56	982	4 338.83	9	7 222.77	9	7 236.16	17	POLAND
18 994.90	141	1 075.61	35	2 283.67	16	2 633.54	49	PORTUGAL
53 780.59	522	1 703.18	9	1 629.96	2	1 893.85	11	ROMANIA
7 673.69	352	4.36	9	10.4	3	10.6	12	SLOVENIA
14 442.27	514	0	0	0	0	0	0	SLOVAKIA
48 847.29	1 803	6 800.05	142	6 424.98	87	7 140.36	168	FINLAND
57 409.66	4 020	9 258.61	451	4 742.80	138	9 328.91	489	SWEDEN
20 883.77	835	67 100.91	165	11 556.75	134	74 082.86	298	UNITED KINGDOM
788 476.95	26 430	245 859.3	2 313	180 192.52	1031	318 133.18	3 024	EU28



Note that the graph only covers the terrestrial part of the SCI network, marine species and habitat types are not taken into account. (Situation: December 2013)

* For these countries the evaluation is based on data from 2011 or earlier.

Sufficiency of the European Natura 2000 Network

For Sites of Community Importance under the Habitats Directive (SCIs), the Commission, with assistance from the ETC-BD, evaluates the completeness of the network by individually assessing, for each species and habitat type, whether its occurrence is sufficiently well covered by the existing sites. The level of completeness of Natura 2000 can be expressed as the percentage of species' and habitats' assessments per member state indicating that the network is complete. The graph indicates the result of this evaluation for the terrestrial part of Natura 2000:

- SR** (scientific reserve): additional research needed to identify the best sites;
- IN MAJ** (major insufficiency): none of the sites where that species/habitat type occurs have been proposed so far;
- IN MOD** (moderate insufficiency): additional sites still need to be proposed or existing sites be extended for that species/habitat type;
- IN MIN** (minor insufficiency): sufficiency could be achieved by adding the species/habitat type as a qualifying feature to existing sites;
- SUF** (sufficient): the network is sufficient for that species/habitat type.



© Alex Mustard / naturepl.com

Long-snouted seahorse, Hippocampus guttulatus, hiding in a Posidonia bed. Protected under the Habitats Directive, Posidonia beds are of major economic as well as ecological value.

Natura 2000 in the marine environment

From the warm waters of the Mediterranean to the vast openness of the Atlantic Ocean, from the cool brackish conditions of the Baltic Sea, to the murky depths of the Black Sea, Europe's marine environment is remarkably varied. As a result, its complex marine ecosystems host a surprisingly rich array of species and habitats, some of which are found nowhere else in the world.

Europe's regional seas are also amongst the most productive in the world, offering a wide range of ecosystem goods and services which, in turn, support the livelihoods of over 5.4 million people across the EU and generate a gross added value of almost €500 billion a year.

Our marine environment is, however, under continuous pressure. Human impacts such as overfishing, extraction of resources, contamination, marine litter and climate change are driving the loss of marine biodiversity and decreasing the benefits that Europeans can derive from their seas.

Over the years, the EU has developed an increasingly robust framework for addressing these challenges in order to encourage a more sustainable use of its marine resources.

Of particular importance are the Birds and Habitats Directives and, more recently, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), adopted in 2008. Together, they form the

environmental pillar of the EU's wider Integrated Maritime Policy. The new Common Fisheries Policy and European Maritime and Fisheries Fund complete the picture.

Site designation

The marine Natura 2000 sites designated under the Birds and Habitats Directives are at the core of the marine protected areas network in Europe.

Whilst progress in designating marine sites has been much slower than that on land, and still has major gaps, the marine Natura 2000 network is, nevertheless, a major achievement for marine biodiversity conservation in Europe.



© Alex Mustard / naturepl.com

The Habitats Directive lists nine marine habitat types and 16 species for which marine site designation is required, whilst the Birds Directive lists a further 60 bird species whose conservation requires marine site protection.

The two directives focus on a sub-set of threatened and vulnerable marine species and habitats in the EU's marine environment. As such, they have a much narrower remit than the MSFD which covers all aspects of Europe's marine biodiversity.

To date, 2960 Natura 2000 marine sites have been designated, covering some 251,500 km² (status 2013), an area the size of the United Kingdom.

This is almost double what it was just 10 years ago and does not yet take account of further significant designations done in 2014 (especially for Spain and the UK). Reefs and sand banks are by far the most represented habitat types in Natura 2000.

Site designation is, however, very uneven between the five different marine biogeographical regions. In areas such as the Greater North Sea and the Baltic Sea, marine Natura 2000 sites cover almost 18% and 12% respectively. They have been assessed by the European Commission as being more than 50% complete. In other regional seas, such as Macaronesia and parts of the Mediterranean Sea the cover is far lower, sometimes falling below 2%.

In terms of the distribution of Natura 2000 sites, the majority is concentrated within the Member States' territorial waters. However, offshore sites, where they have been established, are often much larger. Examples are El Cachucho in the Bay of Biscay (234,950 ha), North West Rockall Bank in the Atlantic (436,526 ha), and the Sylt Outer Reef in the southern North Sea (531,429 ha).

Overall, Natura 2000 covers around 4% of the total EU marine area – which although

significant – is still well below the global target of 10% set by the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2010.

A lack of scientific knowledge

One of the key reasons for slow progress in marine site designation has been the lack of information on the distribution of EU protected marine habitats and species, especially at a level of detail required to enable sites to be identified and appropriate management to be introduced.

Several Member States have made significant efforts to carry out marine surveys in order to assist with the identification and selection of suitable sites, a number of which have been co-financed through the EU LIFE fund (e.g. INDEMARES, see box). Nevertheless, conducting offshore marine surveys continues to be a major – and very expensive – challenge.

Another reason for the slow designation of offshore sites may be attributed to the initial debate over the geographical extent of the Habitats Directive.

This was finally settled in 2005 when the European Court of Justice delivered an Opinion confirming that the EU Directives apply in all marine areas where Member States exercise their rights to exploit their natural resources – including EEZs and the Continental Shelf.

To assist further in this process, the Commission published a guidance document on the establishment of marine Natura 2000 in 2007. It provided clarification on the definitions of some of the marine habitat types and species requiring designation as marine Natura 2000 sites, as well as on locating and selecting Natura 2000 sites, introducing appropriate management measures and linking Community policy on fisheries with the provisions of the Birds and Habitats Directives.

Conservation and management of sites

Until now, most attention has focused on identifying and designating suitable marine sites for Natura 2000, with different regions making progress at different rates. Less has been achieved on the next stage, which involves establishing suitable conservation objectives and appropriate management regimes for Natura 2000 sites.

The challenge of managing marine Natura 2000 sites reflects the need to operate in a complex and often relatively inaccessible environment. Protected habitats and species, are subjected to a wide variety of threats and pressures, ranging from those which can be tackled at a very local level, to others, such as climate change, which need to be addressed globally.

So far, protection has most often involved restrictions on these pressures and threats, such as limits on fishing effort, on use of certain gear types, or on certain damaging activities such as extraction, often via a system of zonation within a Natura 2000 site.

Examples include the trawling restrictions in specified area within the management zones. These have been applied with some degree of success, for example in three Natura 2000 sites in Dutch waters; the North

Sea Coastal Zone, the Vlakte van de Raan and the Voordelta.

Effective management may also require collaboration between Member States, and should build on all the work that has already been done through the existing Regional Seas Conventions.

The Dogger Bank, in the southern North Sea, is a typical example where this approach is key given that adjacent sections of the site have been designated as SACs by Germany, The Netherlands and the UK.

For this site, significant efforts have been made to work together through an intergovernmental Dogger Bank Steering Group to put forward proposals for a fisheries management plan for the combined Dogger Bank SAC area. Whilst these have still to be formally submitted to the Commission, the exercise has demonstrated how Member States can work together to bring forward management proposals for trans-boundary sites.

Involving stakeholders

Stakeholder participation is another aspect that is widely recognised as being essential to the success of marine Natura 2000 site conservation. There are many models that can be considered, ranging from the dissemination of information

Below: One of the major pressures on Natura 2000 comes from fishing. Opposite: Nudibranch, Chromodoris luteorosea, in the Tyrrhenian Sea, Mediterranean.



through to active involvement in the day-to-day management of Natura 2000 sites.

One of the most significant benefits, as many LIFE projects have demonstrated time and again, has been the building of an understanding and appreciation of the protection

areas and through this, a partnership approach of working towards their success.

In the Azores, Project Mare has raised the profile of Natura 2000 by developing a range of educational materials; in the UK, stakeholders have become representatives on SAC

management communities; in The Netherlands, they have helped develop a code of conduct on access to avoid disturbing wildlife; and in Ireland, the government has worked with the national and international scientific community to develop a code of practice for marine

scientific research at Irish coral reef SACs.

Ensuring better policy integration

However, no marine Natura 2000 site can operate in isolation. Integrating the requirements of the Birds and Habitats Directives into wider European policy areas is therefore fundamental to the success of Natura 2000.

In this context, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive is particularly important. Focusing on all marine diversity, it takes a more holistic ecosystem-based approach towards achieving its overall objective of reaching or maintaining Good Environmental Status (GES) by 2020.

The implementation of Birds and Habitats Directives, especially through the establishment of the marine Natura 2000 network, can therefore make an important contribution to the overarching objectives of the MSFD.

Similarly, the MSFD can help to ensure that Natura 2000 sites are not compromised as it requires measures to maintain Good Environmental Status also outside of the protected sites.

Integration with fisheries policy is also key, as commercial fisheries are acknowledged to be a group of activities that has the potential to most affect the conservation status of habitats and species protected in Natura 2000 sites. Outside territorial waters the European Commission has exclusive competence for fisheries management measures. This means that all types of regulation and restrictions must be done through the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

In this context, the recently revised CFP provides for fishery management measures that allow Member States to fulfill their obligations as regards the conservation of Natura 2000 sites and other Marine Protected Areas.

It also allows for the Commission to introduce emergency measures if there is

INDEMARES – inventory and designation of marine Natura 2000 sites in the Spanish Sea (LIFE07 NAT/E/000732)

Recognising that research in offshore marine areas is very costly and few institutions have the necessary means or capability to undertake such work, this ambitious LIFE project was launched in 2007 at a cost of €15.5 mil (with the EU LIFE fund contributing €7.7 mil). Its aim is to significantly improve the scientific knowledge of marine habitats and species in Spanish waters.

The project began by carrying out extensive studies to help identify the most representative marine areas around Spain. This has led to the designation of 10 new marine Natura 2000 sites covering 2.5 million ha. Thereafter, it developed guidelines for the management and sustainable use of these 10 new sites in close consultation with all relevant institutions, NGOs and competent administrations.

Particular attention was paid to involving key stakeholder groups, especially fishermen, in order to build up a constructive dialogue and consensus between all key socio-economic sectors involved in the conservation and management of the natural resources of the sea.

One of the key contributing factors to this was the development of a new methodology for the elaboration of fisheries footprints which makes it possible to identify, with some degree of accuracy, those areas that are targeted by different fishing interests and fishing methods. This can then be used as a basis for negotiating zonation schemes where appropriate fishing levels can be set in order to benefit marine biodiversity whilst causing the least possible impact on the fishermen.

<http://www.indemares.es>

Marine surveys are expensive and time-consuming.





Arctic tern, Sterna paradisaea, under threat from depletion of fish stocks and water pollution, amongst others.

Marine LIFE projects

Over the period 2005–2012, the EU has committed a total of €70.5 mil to 72 LIFE projects supporting marine policies. This has been matched by a further €76.4 mil coming from beneficiaries, partners and co-financiers in the Member States.

Just over half of the projects (51.5%) are LIFE-nature projects operating in marine Natura 2000 sites, and aimed at improving the scientific knowledge base, demonstrating good management practices and establishing appropriate management systems as well as engaging stakeholders and building awareness. The other half are LIFE-ENV projects which have addressed a wider range of marine pressures and threats, such as marine pollution, underwater noise or fisheries bycatches.

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/publications/lifepublications/generalpublications/generalpub.htm>

evidence of a serious threat to marine biological resources or to marine ecosystems relating to fishing activities, such as in a Natura 2000 site, in the waters of a Member State. These measures can be introduced at the request of a Member State or on the Commission's own initiative.

Maritime Spatial Planning is another area of European policy which can support, as

well as benefit from, the Natura 2000 network. Such plans have the potential to reduce the risk of spatial conflicts between maritime uses, including the protection of the marine environment, in such a way that the social and economic demands on marine areas are compatible with safeguarding the marine environment.

This policy can also help protect the environment through the

early identification of impacts, and opportunities for the multiple use of space.

Looking towards the future

Whilst a lot remains to be done to achieve a complete and effective Natura 2000 network in the marine environment, it is important to recognise that considerable progress has already been made.

The priorities now are not only on completing the network (particularly in offshore areas), but also on ensuring that Natura 2000 sites have adequate regulation and management to deliver the required protection.

Much of this is likely to come from site-specific initiatives. But joint research, collaboration between Member States, particularly for trans-boundary sites, accompanied by strong legislative underpinning, stakeholder involvement and the continuing work of Member States is key.

As part of this process, a marine biogeographical seminar will be held in France in May. The aim is to exchange experiences and best practices, identify common objectives and priorities, and enhance cooperation and synergies in managing marine Natura 2000 sites.

This will be an important opportunity to discuss the challenges in greater detail, but also to learn from good practice to date and to move the implementation of the Natura 2000 network into its next key phase.

More info on: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/marine/index_en.htm

Shoal of Cardinal fish, Apogon imberbis, Ischia Island, Italy.



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Lynx, Lynx lynx.

The EU Large Carnivore Initiative

Following the launch of the EU Platform on the Co-existence between People and Large Carnivores in June 2014 (see previous issue), the Commission has issued a series of documents, on its special Large Carnivores webpage, which provide up-to-date information on the status, distribution and key actions required for the management of the wolf, bear, lynx and wolverine in the EU.

Prepared with the help of a large team of experts these documents aim to encourage different stakeholders and

authorities to implement a number of agreed key recommendations, wherever possible. A number of EU-funded pilot actions on large carnivores have also been launched, focusing on:

- exploring traditional husbandry methods to reduce wolf predation on free-ranging cattle in the Iberian Peninsula;
- defining, preventing, and reacting to problem bear behaviour in the Alps;
- engaging hunters and other stakeholders in joint large-carnivore monitoring activities in the Northern Carpathians;

- communicating on the usefulness for damage prevention as well as the cultural heritage value of shepherding systems with livestock-guarding dogs, shepherds and enclosures.

Further details available on the large carnivore webpage: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/index_en.htm

Natura 2000 Award

After a successful first year, the European Commission's Natura 2000 Award opened for a new round of applications on 26 November. The Award aims to reward excellence in the management and promotion of the Natura 2000 network, and to raise awareness of its benefits to European citizens. It is open to all entities from any EU Member State involved in activities related to Natura 2000 – be they local and national authorities, businesses, land owners, NGOs, educational institutions or individuals.

This year, the Award will continue to recognise good practice in Natura 2000 sites in the following categories: Communication; Socio-Economic Benefits; Conservation; Reconciling Interests/Perceptions; and Cross-Border Cooperation and Networking. In addition, a 'EU Citizen's Award' has been introduced to encourage the public to vote for their favourite application.

The winners will be announced at a high level ceremony in Brussels on 'Natura 2000 Day' on 21 May.

More information is on: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/awards/>

Further Natura 2000 seminars planned for 2015

Two further Natura 2000 kick-off seminars are planned this year in the context of the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process – they concern the Continental and the Marine Biogeographical Regions.

The Continental kick-off seminar will be hosted by the Luxembourg Ministry for Sustainable Development and Infrastructures and will take place in Luxembourg from 29 June to 1 July. It will also cover the Pannonian, Black Sea and Steppic Regions.

A list of habitats for priority consideration has been drawn up and a call for proposals has been launched to collect background information on major issues of common interest regarding conservation objectives and measures, as well as examples of good practice in managing these habitats across the EU.

Building on the experience from the terrestrial seminars, a kick-off seminar for Marine Biogeographical Regions is also foreseen. It will be held in St Malo, France on 5–7 May and hosted by the French Ministry of Environment, in close collaboration with the European Commission. The seminar will follow a similar structure to that of the terrestrial seminars, dealing with common issues, pressures and threats; management requirements, measures and solutions, as well as opportunities for cooperative action.

For further information go to the EC Natura 2000 Communication Platform: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/platform/index_en.htm



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A landmark agreement was reached at COP12, Pyeongchang, South Korea.

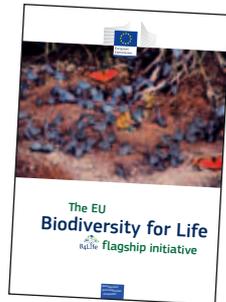
Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

The 12th Conference of Parties (COP12) to the CBD in Pyeongchang, Korea in October 2014, saw the adoption of the 'Gangwon Ministerial Declaration on Biodiversity for Sustainable Development', which highlights the essential contribution of biodiversity and ecosystem services to sustainable development and the post-2015 agenda.

Informed by the findings of the Global Biodiversity Outlook 4 (GBO4), which suggests that substantially greater efforts are needed to meet the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, COP12 adopted a number of important decisions which together comprise the so-called 'Pyeongchang Roadmap', focusing in particular on resource mobilisation, marine biodiversity, invasive alien species, climate change and biodiversity, ecosystem conservation and restoration, synthetic biology, biodiversity and sustainable development.

A landmark agreement was reached on setting 2020 targets for mobilising resources in support of biodiversity. The agreement reaffirms the political commitment made at the previous Conference of Parties, and adopts the target to double international biodiversity-related resource flows to developing countries by 2015, complemented by a domestic resource mobilisation target.

The EU is already confirmed as a major contributor to the process. The 2014 EU accountability report on finance



for development, indicates that biodiversity-related finance from the EU and its Member States to developing countries increased significantly from the period 2006–2010 to 2012, from around €190 million to €289 million. This figure is estimated to have gone up to €300 million in 2013.

Greater protection for the world's threatened migratory species

The 11th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), was held in Quito, Ecuador last November. Thirty-one species were added to the Convention's two appendices, including a record number of shark, ray and sawfish species. The EU proposed the addition of thresher sharks *Alopias* sp., the Cuvier's beaked-whale, *Ziphius cavirostris* and the European roller, *Coracias garrulus* – all of which were accepted.

In addition, the COP adopted a number of key documents of relevance to nature conservation in the EU, including an international action plan for the Saker falcon *Falco cherrug*, guidelines in renewable energy technology deployment and migratory species, as well as



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European roller, *Coracias garrulus*.

global guidelines to prevent the risk of poisoning of migratory birds. The latter calls for the phasing out of the use of lead gunshot, lead bullets and lead fishing weights.

Full details on the CMS website: <http://www.cms.int/en>

European Court of Auditors report on uptake of EU funds for biodiversity

In July 2014, the European Court of Auditors published a report on the uptake of EU funds for biodiversity. The report assesses the effectiveness of the European

Regional Development Fund (ERDF, 2007–2013) in funding projects that are directly promoting biodiversity. It examined the extent to which Member States took advantage of the available ERDF funding and assessed the performance of 32 sampled projects.

The Court found that available ERDF financing opportunities have not been exploited to their full potential by the Member States. Whilst ERDF co-funded projects in the field of biodiversity generally match Member State and EU priorities for halting biodiversity loss, further efforts are needed to monitor their actual practical contribution to biodiversity on the ground and to ensure their effects are long-lasting. For instance, many of the activities involved the preparation of management plans which must now be implemented.

The report concludes with a series of recommendations on how to strengthen the future use of ERDF for biodiversity.

Available from: http://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR14_12/QJAB14012ENC.pdf

Pelagic thresher shark, *Alopias pelagicus*.



© Doug Perrine / naturepic.com



The DG Environment stand at the IUCN World Parks Congress.

IUCN World Parks Congress

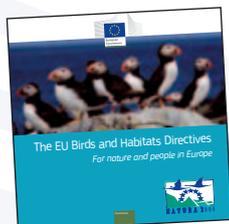
The 6th IUCN World Parks Congress took place in Sydney in November 2014. Hosted every 10 years, the Congress brought together around 6000 protected area leaders and professionals, as well as influential members of the wider civil society, from across the globe. Based around the theme, *'Parks, people, planet: inspiring solutions'*, the Congress set out to present and discuss original approaches for conservation and development that could help to address today's most pressing global challenges.

DG Environment organised an EU Stand at the Congress in order to showcase the Natura 2000 Network and demonstrate its practical implementation, as illustrated by different EU LIFE-funded projects.

The key outcome of the Congress is the so-called 'Promise of Sydney' available on: http://worldparkscongress.org/about/promise_of_sydney.html

New brochure on the Birds and Habitats Directives

A new brochure has been published on the Birds and Habitats Directives. Aimed at the wider general public, this attractive publication describes the key objectives and provisions of the two directives in a concise and reader-friendly manner.



Launched at the IUCN World Parks Congress in Sydney in November, the publication complements the existing brochure on *'20 years of the Habitats Directive'* which describes its major achievements to date, as illustrated by a wide range of practical examples from across the EU.

Available online at: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/info/pubs/directives_en.htm Printed copies can be ordered from: nature@ec.europa.eu or through the EU Bookshop.

2015 Green Week to focus on biodiversity

This year Green Week (3–5 June) will once again focus on nature and biodiversity, under the heading *'Nature – our health, our wealth'*. As the biggest annual conference on European environmental issues, this free event brings together over 3000 participants from government, business and industry, non-governmental organisations, academia and the media, to discuss and exchange good practice experiences on key topical issues.

The first draft programme is expected to be available at the beginning of February and will focus in particular on the value of nature and biodiversity to our society.

Go to: www.ec.europa.eu/greenweek

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