The Action Plan:
for nature, people and the economy
In 2014 I began my term as Commissioner for the Environment with a mandate to evaluate Europe’s Nature Directives. My task was to check their capacity to deliver modern solutions to the problems currently facing Europe’s biodiversity.

My response was a thorough “Fitness Check” of their effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, relevance and EU added value. When the process concluded, the conclusions were clear – the legal framework remains as sound and relevant as it was at the time of its creation, 25 years ago.

But I also found some real problems with how this legislation is being put into action. The challenges include funding shortages, knowledge gaps, and low stakeholder engagement. If we want to ensure that our natural heritage is sustainably managed, and that it continues to deliver the essential benefits we all depend upon, then we will need greater efforts not just inside Natura 2000, but beyond the network as well.

So my task has now developed. We must spur Europe towards those greater efforts. To that end, I am presenting an all-encompassing EU Action Plan for Nature, People and the Economy. It comprises 15 major actions grouped into four priority areas, with 100 individual measures.

The plan aims to improve guidance and knowledge, build political ownership, and strengthen compliance and investment in nature. By boosting the implementation of the Directives on the ground, and ensuring their coherence with Europe’s wider socio-economic objectives, I am confident that these hundred measures will deliver the protection our nature requires.

Communication and outreach form a central strand in this plan. Protecting nature means engaging citizens, stakeholders and communities, and ensuring that the strong connection Europeans feel for nature is converted into practical steps. The launch of a European Natura 2000 day on 21 May is one such step. We all need to do more to demonstrate the enormous benefits of this wonderful network, which is also an outstanding achievement of European co-operation.

The success of this plan won’t depend on the European Commission. It will depend on widespread engagement, from a variety of stakeholders throughout the Member States, working together at local, regional, national and EU level.

We all share the objectives of our legislation, and this plan is a blueprint for all Europeans who care deeply about Europe’s nature. So I invite you to look closely at its contents, and to join me in helping deliver on its commitments.

Our nature deserves nothing less.

Karmenu Vella
European Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
The Action Plan aims to improve the implementation of the Nature Directives in order to deliver practical results on the ground.

**An Action Plan for nature, people and the economy**

**Paving the way for better implementation**

In April, The Commission launched a comprehensive Action Plan to improve the practical implementation of the Nature Directives and accelerate progress towards the EU 2020 goal of halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The Action Plan follows hard on the heels of the Fitness Check published at the end of last year (see previous issue) which concluded that the Nature Directives are fit for purpose. The review, however, also stressed that in order for the Directives to achieve their objectives and realise their full potential, there needs to be a substantial improvement in their implementation. Without this extra push they will be unable to deliver practical results on the ground.

The new Action Plan covers four priority areas that have been identified as being essential for a better implementation of the Directives. They involve improving guidance and knowledge, building political ownership and enforcing compliance, strengthening investment in Natura 2000 and ensuring better communication and outreach.

In total, 15 concrete actions and over one hundred individual measures are foreseen to be implemented between now and 2019. These will be undertaken at both the EU level – the Commission and the Committee of the Regions will have a central role to play – and at national, regional and local levels.

Building on the momentum generated, and support received for the two Directives following the Fitness Check, the Action Plan will offer a range of opportunities to engage stakeholders and the public and to create partnerships across different policy areas. This should in turn help to lay a solid foundation for building bridges between nature, people and the economy.

Four priority areas for action

Priority A: Improving guidance and knowledge and ensuring better coherence with broader socio-economic objectives

The Fitness Check revealed that Member States have adopted varying approaches to implementing the Directives, which has sometimes lead to unnecessary conflicts and problems. In particular, inflexible application of the species protection rules, delays and unduly heavy burdens in site permitting procedures, and insufficient stakeholder awareness have created needless tensions between nature protection and socio-economic activities. The Action Plan aims to provide practical solutions to these problems and promote smarter participatory approaches that encourages the full involvement of landowners and users.

The following three actions are foreseen under Priority 1 of the Action Plan:

1. To update, develop and actively promote, in all EU languages, guidance on site permitting procedures, species protection and management and for specific sectors, as well as on integrating ecosystem services into decision-making;
2. To establish a support mechanism to help Member State authorities address key challenges in applying the permitting requirements of the Birds and Habitats Directives for Natura 2000 and species protection rules;
3. To improve knowledge, including through enhanced and more efficient monitoring, and ensure public online access to data necessary for implementing the Directives, e.g. high-resolution satellite imagery and full implementation of the INSPIRE Directive.

Action 1: Develop, update and promote Commission Guidance on the implementation of the Nature Directives

Over the years, the Commission services have issued guidance documents and good practice reports on a range of topics relating to the implementation of the Nature Directives. Some have focused on the implementation of the site permitting procedure under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive, or on the application of the species protection provisions. Others have taken a more sector-specific approach, looking, for instance, at how best to reconcile development activities such as aquaculture, quarrying and windfarms with the requirements of EU legislation. Their ultimate aim is to clarify the flexibility provided by the Nature Directives, promote strategic planning and early screening of plans and projects, and encourage more streamlined assessment procedures that are combined with other EU environmental laws.

However, according to the Fitness Check there is an urgent need not only to update, translate and further develop these guides but also to promote them more actively amongst the different authorities and stakeholders involved. Therefore, under Action 1 of the Action Plan, the Commission, in close cooperation with Member States and stakeholders will:

✓ Update the interpretative guidance document on provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive on the conservation and management of Natura 2000 (by 2017);
✓ Update the methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive on the permitting requirements for plans and projects regarding Natura 2000 sites, also addressing issues relevant for the Projects of Common Interest (PCI) under the Trans-European Transport and Energy Networks (TEN-T/TEN-E) (by 2018);
✓ Update the guidance on species protection rules under the Habitats Directive (by 2018);
✓ Update the ‘Key concepts document on the period of reproduction and prenuptial migration of huntable bird species in the EU’ (by 2019);
✓ Develop a new guidance on hydropower and Natura 2000 (by 2017);
✓ Develop a new guidance on electricity transmission facilities and Natura 2000 (by 2017);
✓ Update guidance on wind energy and Natura 2000 (by 2019); and
✓ Develop new guidance on Natura 2000 and fisheries under the Common Fisheries Policy rules (by 2018).
Priority B: Building political ownership and strengthening compliance

Member States are ultimately responsible for implementing the Nature Directives on the ground, but the Commission also has an important role to ensure that the Natura 2000 network is fully coherent and functional and that species are protected and, where appropriate, used sustainably.

The Action Plan aims to promote a stronger bilateral dialogue with Member States, the Commission and stakeholders in order to address specific problem areas in managing Natura 2000 sites and protecting species in each country.

The following four actions are envisaged under this priority:

4. Complete the Natura 2000 Network, especially filling gaps for the marine environment, and put in place the necessary conservation measures for all sites;

5. Use the new Environmental Implementation Review (EIR) process for dedicated bilateral meetings with national and regional authorities to develop agreed roadmaps to improve implementation in consultation with stakeholders;

6. Bring together public authorities and stakeholders from different Member States at the biogeographical region level to address common challenges, including on cross-border issues;

7. Further develop Species and Habitats Action Plans for the most threatened species and natural habitats as well as stakeholder platforms on the coexistence with conflict species, e.g. large carnivores.

Action 5: A new support mechanism for Member States

The Environmental Implementation Review (EIR) is a new tool designed to strengthen implementation of EU environmental legislation in Member States. The EIR operates on a regular cycle of analysis, dialogue and collaboration between the European Commission, Member States and stakeholders. It culminates in the publication of a country report every two years which identifies a number of specific issues and challenges being faced by the authorities in that country, including on EU nature legislation and policy, and makes recommendations on how these could be overcome.

Under Action 5, the Commission and Member States will:

- In the framework of the EIR structured dialogue, hold dedicated bilateral meetings, involving national and regional authorities competent for the implementation of the Nature Directives, ideally one for each Member State by 2017–2019. The bilaterals will focus on key implementation issues:
  - the overall strategy for reaching favourable conservation status and for Natura 2000 management, any structural problems in each Member State that is impeding them from managing and financing the necessary conservation measures for the sites;
  - governance approaches and effectiveness of cooperation, e.g. amongst different parts of the Member States administration at central level, between central and regional levels, between administration and stakeholders and with neighbouring Member States;
  - raising awareness, capacity and understanding of legal requirements, including in relation to other environmental legislation such as SEA/EIA and WFD and facilitating efficient implementation approaches; and
  - emphasising the need to actively engage landowners and other stakeholders, especially in management planning for the Natura 2000 sites;
- Based on individual Member States’ needs, identify a number of key actions and establish common implementation roadmaps, with milestones and deliverables.
Priority C: Strengthening investment in Natura 2000 and improving synergies with EU funding instruments

The Fitness Check identified funding shortages as a major obstacle to implementation. The Action Plan therefore aims to make better use of the EU funding available and to render nature more attractive for private investment.

In particular, the actions under this Priority aim to:

8. Strengthen investments in nature:
   a) Help Member States to improve their multi-annual financial planning for Natura 2000 through the update of their Prioritised Action Frameworks (PAFs);
   b) Propose a 10% increase in the part of the LIFE budget dedicated to projects supporting the conservation of nature and biodiversity, while keeping the overall budget of the LIFE programme unchanged; and
   c) Stimulate private sector investment in nature projects.

9. Promote synergies with funding from the Common Agricultural Policy, including effective use of Natura 2000 payments and agri-environment-climate measures, the development of result-based schemes, support to farmers through Farming Advisory Services, and innovation and knowledge transfer through the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability;

10. Increase awareness of Cohesion Policy funding opportunities and improve synergies;

11. Improve synergies with the Common Fisheries Policy and the Integrated Maritime Policy, including more effective use of the financing opportunities available; and

12. Provide guidance to support the deployment of green infrastructure for better connectivity of Natura 2000 areas; support Nature-Based Solutions projects through the EU Research and Innovation Policy, and Horizon 2020 funds.

Action 8: Update the Prioritised Action Frameworks

Prioritised Action Frameworks (PAFs) were developed to help Member States identify their Natura 2000 funding needs and priorities and to better target different sources of EU financing under the 2014–2020 Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF). Although the PAFs were variable in their degree of ambition and quality, the Fitness Check found that, overall, they made a positive contribution to securing funding for Natura 2000 under the different EU funding instruments. However, there is still a need to improve the applicability of the PAFs.

Under Action 8 of the Action Plan, the Commission, together with Member States and stakeholders will:

✓ Review the success of the development/application of the PAFs under current MFF and draw lessons with a view to improving the applicability of this tool and enhance co-benefits for more efficient use of resources (by 2017);

✓ Update the PAF format in agreement with Member States to ensure a more harmonised approach to calculation of costs and identification of conservation objectives and measures, including clear priorities and possible synergies with other sectors and policies (such as green infrastructure) to reflect socio-economic benefits of investing in Natura 2000, e.g. in relation to its climate change mitigation and adaptation potential, human health and wellbeing (by 2017);

✓ Launch a process with Member States for updating their PAFs ahead of the post-2020 MFF in line with Article 8 of the Habitats Directive (by 2018);

✓ Promote awareness about the updated PAFs within the Commission and among Member States authorities, targeting those in charge of programming under different EU policies (as soon as updated PAFs are available, at the latest by 2019);

✓ Support the preparation of LIFE Integrated Projects for Natura 2000, which would focus on key priorities identified in PAFs – aiming for at least one project being initiated in each Member State by 2019, which may include cross-border actions that improve ecological connectivity and overall coherence of the Network; and

Priority D: Better communication and outreach, engaging citizens, stakeholders and communities

The Fitness Check demonstrated that strong involvement of landowners, users and other stakeholders in the process of establishing management plans, or equivalent measures, is essential for the effective and efficient management of Natura 2000 sites. This helps create ownership, embrace approaches that are sustainable in the socio-economic context and are also adapted to local needs.

Under this Priority the Action Plan aims to:

13. Support knowledge exchange and engagement of local and regional authorities through a joint platform with the Committee of the Regions;
14. Support recognition of good management of Natura 2000 sites and awareness-raising of the Nature Directives through relevant fora, and strengthen links between natural and cultural heritage, especially in the context of 2018 as European Year of Cultural Heritage; and
15. Actively involve young people in measures dealing with societal needs by giving them the opportunity to get involved in nature protection in Natura 2000 sites (European Solidarity Corps).

Action 15: The European Solidarity Corps – involving young people in Natura 2000

In September 2016, President Juncker announced the creation of the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) to allow young people across the EU to engage in a broad variety of activities, including protecting the environment.

To support this new initiative, the EU LIFE Fund has recently launched a call for proposals to encourage the deployment of the ESC in the nature sector. The selected projects are expected to last a maximum of 36 months, while the activities of the volunteers should last between two and 12 months, and should focus on actions related to nature conservation and the restoration of natural areas, mainly in Natura 2000.

In 2017 the European Solidarity Corps will be consolidated by a dedicated legal framework. It will offer the opportunity to young people willing to show solidarity to go to another Member State and experience different practices to tackle the challenges of nature protection and disaster prevention, while gaining invaluable experience for future job opportunities.

In 2018, many Natura 2000 sites will celebrate the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

Raising awareness of Natura 2000 amongst school children.

The European Solidarity Corps offers young people the opportunity to assist in nature conservation projects in another Member State.
The Natura 2000 network is composed of sites under the Habitats Directive (pSCI, SCIs or SACs – labelled ‘SCIs’ in the barometer) and sites under the Birds Directive (SPAs). The figures relating to the total area of Natura 2000 sites (i.e. SPAs + SCIs) have been obtained through GIS analysis. This avoids any risk of double counting sites which have been designated under both Directives.

The sufficiency of sites under the Habitats Directive is determined by DG Environment, with the assistance of the European Topic Centre for Biological Diversity. For each Member State, the Commission assesses whether the species and habitat types on Annexes I and II, which are present in the country, are sufficiently represented by the sites designated to date. This is expressed as a percentage of species and habitats for which further areas need to be designated in order to complete the network in that country. A scientific reserve is given when further research is needed in order to identify the most appropriate sites to be added for a given species or habitat.

The number of sufficiency assessments for a given Member State depends both on the number of biogeographical regions to which that Member State belongs, and on the number of habitats and species occurring on its territory in each of these regions.
### SCI SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT

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Celebrating European Natura 2000 Day!

This year, the European Commission together with the European Parliament, the Council Presidency and the Committee of the Regions officially designated 21 May as ‘European Natura 2000 Day’ to celebrate 25 years of the Habitats Directive and the EU LIFE Programme.

The proclamation was signed at a special event in Brussels on 15 May in the presence of the Commissioner for Environment, Karmenu Vella, the Chairwoman of the European Parliament’s Environment Committee, Adina-Ioana Valean, the First Vice-President of the Committee of the Regions, Karl-Heinz Lambertz, and Neil Kerr, Deputy Permanent Representative of Malta.

This special day marks the exact date at which both the Habitats Directive and the LIFE programme were approved in 1992. It started out as a grassroots initiative under a Spanish LIFE project aiming to promote Natura 2000 to the general public but the event turned out to be so popular that the Commission decided to turn it into an official European Day for Natura 2000.

It provides a unique opportunity to celebrate Europe’s rich biodiversity – and the initiatives underway to protect it – through a whole range of events across Europe.

During the proclamation ceremony, Karmenu Vella explained that “... with the European Natura 2000 Day we pay tribute to this unique network and its value for people and our economy. For me it is one of the European Union’s truly outstanding achievements: a network of over 27,000 protected sites, covering over 1 million square kilometres across the land and sea, made possible through co-operation among all our Member States”.

With the declaration of the European Natura 2000 Day, the European Commission has also fulfilled its first pledge under the recent Action Plan for nature, people and the economy, adopted on 27 April in response to a thorough fitness check of the Birds and Habitats Directives. One of the four priority areas of the Plan is aimed at better communication and outreach, engaging citizens, stakeholders and communities.
Natura 2000 celebrations throughout Europe

Already in 2017, over 200 local events and networking activities have taken, or are currently taking place, to celebrate the contribution of the EU nature policy, and in particular the Natura 2000 network, to preserving our rich and diverse natural heritage.

Many of these events were organised by on-going LIFE projects, especially in Italy and Spain which have hosted over 100 activities between them, followed by Belgium (19 events), Poland (13), Germany (12) Greece (12) and Portugal (10). A special toolkit was developed by the European Commission to help promote the unique 'brand' that is Natura 2000, and to explain further what it represents for Europeans.

The activities are truly wide-ranging: from festivals and photography exhibitions to guided walks and cycle tours, photography contests, open days and information seminars, as well as dedicated activities for children to discover nature. Thousands of people have participated in the event. It is hoped that this number will rise exponentially in years to come as the European Natura 2000 Day becomes better known.

For further details go to the following website on 25 Years of Life and Natura 2000 events: http://life-25.eu

A travelling Caravan has been touring different LIFE Project sites in Romania to celebrate and raise awareness of Natura 2000 and the benefits it brings.

21 MAY WILL ALSO BE THE DAY upon which the winners of the Natura 2000 Award will be revealed from now on. The Natura 2000 Award is another key Commission initiative dedicated to recognising excellence in the management and promotion of the network and raising awareness about Natura 2000 and its benefits to European citizens. The 2018 round is now underway, it is open to anyone interested in submitting an application to any one of the six award categories. The deadline is 29 September 2017.


Celebrating Natura 2000 and LIFE in Berlangas, Portugal.
The EU Business @ Biodiversity Platform

Modern enterprises, companies and investors are increasingly aware of the importance of dependencies and impacts on natural capital and biodiversity and their implications for business and financial performance. They recognise that there is a need to assess and quantify these impacts and dependencies in order to understand how a given business relies on natural capital and ecosystem services, and how this translates into financial risk.

Think of a water supplier or beverage company that obviously depends on clean water from nature. Would one invest in it if the company had not credibly assessed, managed and secured the sustained availability of their clean drinking water for decades to come? The same goes for companies in the food or apparel industry. Their supply chains often begin in another continent; upstream they depend on sustainable production and supplies that are directly related to agro-ecosystems while downstream their marketing and sales rely on the trust and reputation created among consumers regarding the ecological and social dimensions of their production chain.

There is therefore an increasing demand for developing methodologies that are capable of removing the blind spots in the financial risk management with regards to the ecological and social dimensions of their production chain.

There is a lot to gain from a better understanding of the interdependencies between business activities and biodiversity.

THE EU B@B PLATFORM’S OBJECTIVES ARE TO:

- work with businesses to develop tools and approaches that promote the integration of biodiversity and natural capital considerations into business practices;
- offer an EU level forum for sustained and strategic dialogue about the links between business and biodiversity; and
- promote better communication, increased awareness and improved co-ordination in relation to business and biodiversity activities.
natural capital and biodiversity. This holds for various levels – from individual projects to the whole portfolio of a bank or even the big funds or institutional investors. There is a lot to gain both for nature and for businesses from a better understanding of the interdependencies between business activities, biodiversity and natural capital.

With this in mind, and in light of various international initiatives underway, the European Commission has set up an EU Business@Biodiversity Platform to enable business members to share and develop methods to assess and quantify such impacts and dependencies, as well as develop new business opportunities. The aim is to facilitate better business decisions, to offer a forum for sharing best practice amongst companies and to facilitate the business-policy dialogue at EU level.

A new phase of the EU B@B Platform was launched this year (2017–2019). It marks the ambition to increase the number of participating companies, foster a stronger buy-in from members as well as strengthen the cooperation with other platforms and networks in smart partnerships. Currently there are some 300 members of the B@B Platform, ranging from micro or large businesses and business associations, to consultancies, NGOs and public authorities from all Member States.

The aim of the EU B@B platform is to provide a forum for sharing best practice amongst companies and facilitate the business-policy dialogue at EU level.

Three thematic workstreams
The B@B Platform invites engagement and facilitates exchanges in three thematic workstreams: Natural Capital Accounting, Innovation, and Finance.

The Natural Capital Accounting workstream aims to help companies identify best practice guidance and available tools to support informed business decisions on the development of natural capital accounting systems. The ongoing work seeks to establish closer cooperation with partner organisations, such as the Natural Capital Coalition or the World Business Council Sustainable Development.

Particular contributions are envisaged on the biodiversity component of the Natural Capital Protocol and the Natural Capital Accounting (NCA) toolkits and guides. The Natural Capital Protocol aims to provide a clear structure for assessing and valuing natural capital related impacts and dependency risks.

The objective of the Innovation for Biodiversity and Business workstream is to promote innovations that contribute to valuing biodiversity and ecosystem services. It aims in particular at developing a natural capital innovation toolbox, share relevant innovations and identify opportunities to foster their scale-up. The Innovation workstream will also develop links to existing innovation supporting projects and networks in order to connect business with knowledge providing platforms.

From 2017 onwards, the Finance workstream will focus on the EU Community of Practice (CoP) Finance@Biodiversity. It offers private financial institutions a forum to share experiences and promote best practices at EU level on how to integrate biodiversity and natural capital into mainstream financial activities and foster investments in natural capital as a new asset class. The Community of Practice aims to accelerate the process of learning and to support its implementation both at strategic level and through practical experience, thereby supporting the transition towards a sustainable financial sector.

B@B business leaders
The new phase of the B@B Platform will also see the nomination of B@B business leaders. This has been introduced to give greater recognition to those members who commit extra time and energy to further the work of the Platform. Each workstream will be led by a workstream leader and they will be further supported by a number of B@B ambassadors.

Finally, particular attention will be paid in this third phase to raising the Platform’s profile. This will be done by further developing its concept and added value to other initiatives at national and international level. Whilst the Platform needs to stand out and demonstrate that it does not duplicate the work of other national and international initiatives and platforms, creating synergies with existing initiatives will be important to find areas of mutual interest that incentivise active B@B member engagement.

For more information on the B@B Platform go to: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/biodiversity/business/index_en.htm
New IAS list adopted
In July, a further 12 species were approved for inclusion in the Union list of Invasive Alien Species (IAS), bringing the total number of species listed so far to 49. These species cause damage on such a scale that dedicated measures across the Union are required to contain and, if possible, eradicate them.

The new list includes a number of well-known species such as giant hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum*, the Himalayan balsam *Impatiens glandulifera*, the muskrat *Ondatra zibethicus* and the Egyptian goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*, as well as some more obscure plants, such as the crimson fountaingrass, *Pennisetum setaceum* which is currently spreading across the Mediterranean. Being a highly inflammable plant, the crimson fountaingrass is not only highly invasive but could also seriously increase the risk and spread of summer fires.

These new species will now be subject to the restrictions and measures set out in the EU Regulation on Invasive Alien Species, for instance as regards their keeping, importing, selling, breeding and growing. Member States will also be required to take measures for their early detection and rapid eradication, in order to manage those that are already widespread in some Member States.

Go to: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/invasivealien/index_en.htm

LIFE 2017
The LIFE Programme has launched its 2017 call for proposals. The total budget this year is around €373 million, of which approximately €160 million is foreseen for action grants supporting the conservation of nature and biodiversity under the sub-programme for Environment.

The call once again covers action grants for traditional projects, preparatory projects, integrated projects and technical assistance projects. New features have been introduced for traditional projects, which are summarised in the first pages of the Guidelines in the application package and detailed further in the different sections.

The deadline for receipt of applications is set at different times during the month of September, depending on the kind of projects foreseen.

For full details regarding the deadlines, guidance, links to application packages and links to National Contacts Points, go to: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/funding/life2017/index.htm

The Natural Capital Finance Facility (NCFF)
The first operation to be supported by the NCFF was signed in April 2017. It consists in a €6 million loan to Rewilding Europe who will provide loans to around 30 nature-focused businesses in ‘Rewilding areas’ across Europe. In addition to the normal installments, these businesses will pay a so-called ‘rewilding levy’ which is used for direct conservation measures implemented by Rewilding Europe.

Rewilding Europe and the individual investments build on the economic returns from nature and wildlife, thereby addressing rural land abandonment, conserving natural landscapes, natural capital and rural cultures and heritage connected to them.

For more info on NFCC, go to: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/funding/financial_instruments/ncff.htm

Rewilding Europe Capital website: https://www.rewildingeurope.com/rewilding-europe-capital/

Court of Auditors report
In February, the European Court of Auditors published a special report on the implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directives. The objective was to examine whether the network was appropriately managed, financed and monitored. Audits were carried out in the Commission, the EEA and in five Member States, which included visits to 24 Natura 2000 sites and consultations with various stakeholder groups.

While recognising the major role played by Natura 2000 in protecting biodiversity, the audit report concluded that the Natura 2000 network has not been implemented to its full potential. In particular, it...
found that Member States were not managing the Natura 2000 network sufficiently well and the necessary conservation measures were often delayed or inappropriately defined. There was also a lack of adequate coordination between relevant authorities, stakeholders and neighbouring Member States.

On the issue of financing, the Audit concluded that EU funds were not well mobilised to support the management of the Natura 2000 network. The 2014–2020 programming documents of the various EU funds used to finance the network (notably the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)) did not fully reflect the funding needs and the Commission did not address these shortcomings in a structured manner.

There is also no specific performance indicator system for the use of EU funds for the network. Indicators did exist at programming level (e.g. the EAFRD), but they related to general biodiversity objectives and focused on outputs rather than on the conservation results of the Natura 2000 network.

The Audit concludes with a number of recommendations to the Commission and Member States aimed at helping to achieve full implementation of the Nature Directives, clarifying the financing and accounting framework of Natura 2000 and better measuring the results achieved by Natura 2000.


Report on ecosystems restoration
Target 2 of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020 calls for the restoration of degraded ecosystems and the services they provide across the EU, in line with the global goal set in 2010 to restore at least 15% of degraded ecosystems.

To contribute to this process, the European Commission recently published a new study exploring the different types of restoration activities underway across the EU and stakeholder groups associated with them. The study also examines the current contribution of restoration actions to sustainable and socially cohesive economic growth and employment, as well as the constraints to the development of the restoration sector. It finishes with a review of EU level activities on ecosystems restoration and a series of recommendations for overcoming existing constraints.


Fisheries and Natura 2000 in the Mediterranean
A workshop on fisheries management measures in Natura 2000 sites in the Mediterranean Sea is foreseen for 10–12 October 2017 in Zadar, Croatia. Co-hosted by the Croatian authorities and the European Commission under the Biogeographical Process, the workshop aims to bring together EU Mediterranean countries to discuss the preparation and implementation of fisheries management measures in line with the Birds and Habitats Directives and the Common Fisheries Policy. Particular attention will be given to existing good practice and benefits of cooperation between nature protection authorities, fisheries sector and stakeholders.

The Natura 2000 Seminars
In the context of the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process, a second Alpine Natura 2000 Seminar was held 21–23 June 2017 in Padova, Italy. The seminar was hosted by the Department of Land, Environment, Agriculture and Forestry (TESAF) – University of Padova. About 100 experts from 13 Member States sharing the Alpine region participated.

The seminar was another milestone in the continuing process of networking, information sharing and knowledge building across the Alpine Biogeographical Region. Over three days, participants discussed Natura 2000 conservation issues and cooperation opportunities. The concrete outputs and follow-up activities will be further developed after the seminar.

The second Mediterranean Natura 2000 Seminar will take place in Cyprus on 14–16 November 2017 hosted by Terra Cypria, the Cyprus Conservation Foundation.


BEST
At the UN Ocean Conference on 5–9 June, the EU made a Voluntary Commitment on ‘Fostering biodiversity action in the outermost regions and overseas countries and territories of EU Member States (BEST)’, as a contribution to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14. The BEST initiative has helped to raise awareness about the importance of the outermost regions and overseas countries and territories for conserving global biodiversity. The European Commission is committed to working with partners to transform BEST into a sustainable partnership.

Recognition for the Natura 2000 network

On 2 May, the European Union received an award from the Regional Administration in Madrid for the important role the Natura 2000 network plays in protecting Europe’s biodiversity, while promoting opportunities for sustainable socio-economic development amongst local communities in rural areas. The Director General for Environment, Mr Daniel Calleja Crespo, received this award on behalf of all the Europeans who contribute with their daily engagement to making Natura 2000 a success.

Culture and nature study

The Commission has published a new study presenting a series of long and short case studies on ‘Linking Natura 2000 and cultural heritage’. It showcases practical examples of how the management of nature and culture has been successfully integrated across Europe, highlighting the actual or potential role played by the Natura 2000 network. Strengthening links between natural and cultural heritage is one of the priorities of the new Action Plan for nature and will be a central theme of the European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018.

Brochure on farming in Natura 2000

The Commission has published a new brochure on farming in Natura 2000 sites which outlines key elements of the Commission’s guidance on how to integrate Natura 2000 conservation objectives into farming practices, published in 2013. The brochure also presents a series of good practice examples from across the EU on farming in, and marketing produce from, Natura 2000.

Links between Natura 2000 and jobs

An estimated 4.4 million jobs depend directly on healthy ecosystems in Europe. A new study published by the Commission, explores the latest state of existing knowledge on the level and type of jobs that are linked to the Natura 2000 network. It also investigates the varying methodologies used to assess employment levels and recommends a way forward to improve the evidence base on the links between Natura 2000 and employment. A dedicated workshop at the EU Green Week high-level conference on Green Jobs in early June investigated further how EU and national nature policy can promote sustainable jobs.


http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/info/pubs/directives_en.htm