Introduction

The establishment of the Natura 2000 network of protected sites is an important element of the Communities’ nature conservation policy. In order to give new impetus to the implementation of Natura 2000, the European Commission and the UK Presidency organised a Conference on 28–30 June 1998 in Bath, in the south west of the UK.

The creation of the Natura 2000 network has been delayed for several reasons. One of these has been the resistance of some local people who are concerned that their social and economic interests might be threatened by the designation of a site.

The objective of the Conference was to encourage co-operation and understanding by bringing together Member States, European and national opinion leaders and representatives of local actors concerned with Natura 2000, providing a forum for the exchange of knowledge and experience, and an opportunity to discuss problems and issues encountered.

The Conference was opened by Mrs Bjerregaard, Member of the European Commission with responsibility for the Environment and Mr Meacher, Minister for the Environment in the UK. Mr Fischler, Member of the European Commission with responsibility for Agriculture, introduced the Commission's proposals for reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. There were also interventions from Prof. Dr Jose Guerreiro, Secretary of State for the Environment, Portugal, and Mrs Caroline Jackson, MEP for Wiltshire North and Bath.

This was followed by workshop sessions covering the problems of managing certain socio-economic sectors and looking at the mechanisms for delivering solutions.

This special edition of the Natura 2000 newsletter summarises and illustrates the conclusions of this Conference.

“The principle of active co-operation with land managers and users is the only way we can deliver the expectations of Natura 2000 in the UK and I think there are important lessons to be learned in Europe.”

“To live sustainably with nature is to acknowledge man's place in adapting and managing it and to ensure that our impact respects its dynamic forces. The reason for making designations is, as it were, to put a flag on the site which says - “take notice”, not “keep out”.”

Michael Meacher

“The revised agri-environmental measures as compared to the present system will allow a better focus on the environmental objectives: Due to its mandatory nature all Member States will have to reflect how to best integrate environmental considerations into their rural development policy.”

“Preservation of the environment and management of rural landscape can and should of course be an integral part of the adaptation of rural areas supported by rural development programmes”.

Franz Fischler
Agriculture

Agriculture and nature

Sustainable agriculture plays a key role in protecting species and habitats. This is intimately linked to EC financial instruments.

The proposals made under Agenda 2000 are central in the integration of environmental issues into the Common Agricultural Policy. These require the full support of Member States for their success.

These discussions will also provide a framework for the development of agriculture in the future new Member States.

Key Points

Farmers respond best if they can see the value of their land for conservation.

They prefer to continue to use the land. Withdrawal from production is less popular than agreements involving management by farmers.

There is a need for ground-level co-ordination in the use of the various available financial instruments (LIFE, agri-environment, structural and cohesion funds).

Alternative sources of funds can be developed, eg value-added and high quality products from protected areas, tourism.

Environmental agencies should be involved in planning and implementation of measures, both local and Community (Structural Fund, Rural Development plans).

LIFE is complementary to other sources of funding and is valuable as a catalyst.

Some policy issues must be addressed in the light of potential changes under Agenda 2000.

Biotope restoration in Emilia-Romagna, Italy

In this project, the use of agri-environmental funds (Regulation 2078) permitted the re-establishment of hedges, wetlands, woods, ponds, marshy meadows and other habitats, while educating the farmers about suitable methods for creation and management of habitats for wild species.

Photo: R. Tinarelli
**Policy issues**

- Continuation of the LIFE instrument is considered to be essential.
- Agri-environmental measures should occupy a central role in the developments in the CAP.
- There is concern over the impact of reducing the co-financing rate of agri-environmental measures from 50% to 25–50% in the new proposals.
- The possibility to designate 10% of Member States as Less Favoured Areas in relation to environmental restrictions is welcomed. However, the lack of specific reference to Natura 2000 is regretted.
- The need for an environmental appraisal within the new Rural Development plans and Structural Fund is of great importance; the involvement of environmental authorities in this appraisal should continue to be obligatory.

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**Biodiversity in Stora Alvaret, Sweden**

Farmers have been encouraged to graze stock on otherwise unattractive areas in order to maintain “alvar” habitats (limestone bedrock covered by thin soil). This has been made financially viable by use of funds from the agri-environmental programme. The optimum level of grazing is established through monitoring by the farmers.

Other restoration works such as on stone walls also increases interest and commitment.

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**Protection of the Great Bustard in Spain**

Because of this project, landowners are now aware that their land supports the largest concentration of the Great Bustard in the world.

A return to the cultivation of dry land lucerne encouraged the increase in numbers of this threatened species. This crop was unprofitable in the absence of CAP support, but is being re-established in areas favoured by the birds under a LIFE project.
Key Points

The EU has not been greatly involved in sustainable forest management until now. The proposed CAP changes under Agenda 2000 offer good opportunities to change this.

State-owned forests should play a key role as examples of how forestry can be part of the sustainable management of Natura 2000 sites.

Financial incentives are needed to motivate private forest owners to act in line with sustainable management practices.

Natura 2000 will require a network of un-exploited old forest reserves as well as sustainably-managed forests.

The first LIFE forest protection projects have shown that Natura 2000 can help build local partnerships.
Restoration of Atlantic Oakwoods

The Atlantic oakwoods in the UK had been exploited in a sustainable way until this century. Changes in the traditional management system led to depleted biodiversity and lack of local benefits from the woods. “Local Operational Planning Teams”, including landowners, were created to tap into local knowledge. This ensured that effective conservation solutions were combined with maximum benefit to local owners.

Direct financial incentives came from the Forestry Authority and the LIFE project. Other local and EC funds were used to pay for skilled labour for restoration of the woods.

The use of local staff with local knowledge is important. In Scotland, credibility was increased by using respected specialists to produce deer management plans.

Regular review of the plans with the local stakeholders is important.

The Flying Squirrels of Nuuksio, Finland

The flying squirrels were threatened by logging operations.

At the beginning, the landowners knew little about the squirrels, and there was a lack of scientific knowledge.

Research provided a clearer picture of their habitats and behavioural needs. This information was used to draw up a forestry management guide, with the active participation of the landowners organisations. This helped secure their acceptance of the recommendations.

A general plan for future land use in the Nuuksio area has been developed by a group which includes all interested sectors. Public meetings were also held. This provides a blueprint for the integration of nature protection, recreation and environmental education.

Photo: Finnish Forest and Parks Service

Mediterranean Oakwoods

Management in this French LIFE project has enhanced these old woodlands, reduced the fire risk, improved their conservation value, and allowed timber extraction and meat production to take place.

Grazing helps keep habitats clear for birds which favour open grasslands, and provides employment for shepherds, who also have a fire prevention role.

Tourism and recreation do disturb birds and some human activities. Working together, the local authorities and environmental associations realised that they must collaborate to produce realistic objectives.

Ways have now been found to reduce the disturbance to an acceptable level while allowing tourist activities to continue.

Photo: Georges de Maupeou
Tourism and nature

Tourism is developing faster than other sectors in the EC at present. The main beneficiaries rely on the quality of nature to attract visitors. They therefore are potential partners in nature conservation projects.

However, an increase in tourism resulting from improvements in infrastructure and in the quality of the sites may be damaging to the environment. Tourist management is therefore needed.

Tourism may also change the economic conditions of the area, by encouraging a move from other traditional land uses.

A strong vision of how the local development should take place is necessary, taking into account planning, funding, monitoring, marketing and integration into other sectors, with full consultation of local people.

People’s diverse reasons for engaging in leisure activities should be considered. Recreational users should be consulted.

Key Points

Because of the money and jobs it generates, tourism can contribute to preservation of the ecosystems, by providing an economic reason to do so. Quality of life is improved by visiting beautiful and interesting sites, providing an incentive to preserve them.

Natura 2000 can contribute to tourism, by improving the quality of sites, and, therefore the satisfaction of the tourists.

Tourism should be incorporated in the development of Natura 2000 sites towards long term sustainability.

Tourism can determine the future of the whole zone, especially in fragile areas.

Natura 2000 sites need a strategy for the control of tourists, with strong use of planning and management instruments.

The benefits and costs must be shared equitably by all local parties.

Priorities must be set for investment of resources.

Ownership of the site facilitates integration of nature and tourism, by allowing the profit from one to pay for the other.

The coastal dunes of Circeo, Italy

The coastal dunes of Circeo are being eroded, mainly because of visitors trampling on the vegetation. Previous LIFE projects attempted to halt erosion by technical means (windbreaks, barriers, re-planting etc) but this did not solve all the problems.

It was planned to channel visitors by closing a road along the dunes, and building a car park from which a shuttle would take visitors to and from the beach. This was opposed by local politicians, because, amongst other reasons, it would stop vendors from selling to tourists from the roadside.

The lesson is that, in projects which affect livelihoods, consensus must be reached beforehand with all concerned.
The Charter for Sustainable Tourism

This seeks to build a close partnership between conservation agencies, the tourist industry and the local community.

Ten principles for sustainable tourism have been identified. These principles are accepted by the tourist businesses, including hotels, restaurants, travel agents and tour guides, as well as conservation agencies, who have signed the Charter.

The principles include reference to managing the impact of tourism, while using tourism to contribute to conservation and to support the local economy.

Each business produces an action plan, based on the agreed principles.

Managed access to the Isle of Purbeck, UK

This site, which draws more than a million visitors per year, is owned by the National Trust. It is both a popular tourist destination and a rich and diverse natural area. Good management has led to an increase in the number of visitors.

A strategy has been developed to cope with the traffic jams and parking problems, and to manage water activities.

Income derived from car parking, letting of beach huts, retail sales and franchising more than covers management costs.

A strategy has also been developed to cope with the traffic jams and parking problems, and to manage water activities.

Natura 2000 in the New Forest, UK

This area receives 17 million visits per year. Many local people depend on the forest for their livelihood. Tourism is the largest employer.

The future of the habitats, which draw the tourists, depends on the persistence of a pastoral economy sustained by a small vulnerable group of Commoners who live and work in the Forest, but who do not directly benefit from tourism.

Visitor impact is intense but localised. The New Forest partnership, which involves the Commoners and other groups, seeks to restore and preserve habitats through better seasonal and spatial distribution and management of recreation.

NATURA 2000 AND PEOPLE – A PARTNERSHIP
Hunting for game species

Key Points

**Hunting is a legitimate activity** under the Birds Directive, and is not *a priori* to be excluded from Natura 2000 sites.

For the Habitats Directive, game hunting is very unlikely to cause a problem, except for a small number of species.

For the Birds Directive, the issue is more complex and requires study on a site by site basis.

**Sustainable hunting is a possible management tool.** There is a range of possible management techniques which can provide benefits for the species and the hunters (*“win-win scenario”*).

Conservation objectives may, however, result in *limitation of hunting activities*.

All stakeholders, including hunters, should be involved in the development of *management plans*.

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**Liminganlahti Wetland, Finland**

In agreement with the local hunters, various methods to regulate hunting have been introduced – visitors license limits, bag limits, closed periods, and protection periods during the hunting season. These are supplemented by “disturbance free” zones.

A statutory protected area and a further voluntary area has been established, also with the hunters’ support.

Hunting opportunities improve outside refuges as resident bird numbers increase.

This area is also subject to other pressures, and extensive co-operation with landowners, farmers and foresters, with co-ordinated use of various EC funds, have made nature conservation more acceptable to the local people. The hunters have played a part, for example by assisting in birdwatching areas.

Together, all groups have produced a sustainable management plan, including protection areas, nature tourism, game reserves, as well as hunting.

**Hunting on El Hondo, Spain**

Hunting for wildfowl is traditional at El Hondo. The number of birds killed has fallen from over 30,000 in the sixties to 6,550.

A two stage action plan was developed.

In phase 1, there was a series of progressive restrictions in the number of hunters, size of hunting areas and length of hunting period. Emergency restrictions were also imposed in times of drought, floods, disease etc.

In phase 2, a standard management plan was developed, involving the hunters as well as experts on the different species and conservation authorities. Some species plans were developed, eg for *Marmaronetta angustirostris*.

Compensation was paid to landowners to keep the water level up to the optimal needed for the birds.

The strategy adopted by the authorities is based on the need to arrive at a consensus solution, with all concerned involved in the final decisions.

Unfortunately, it has not so far been possible to obtain full consensus for the action.

Photo: José L. Echevarriás
FACE – the European Hunters Federation: case studies

About 90% of Europe’s natural and semi-natural areas are used for recreational fishing and hunting. The hunters can play an important part in safeguarding marshes, rivers and estuaries from pollution and over-exploitation, and in carrying out research on the management and biology of wildfowl.

In Pas-de Calais, France, a valuable wetland was threatened by overgrowth of vegetation and drying out by agricultural drainage. It was bought privately as a habitat for snipe, but also for limited snipe hunting.

In Lindisfarne, UK, the hunters’ association and the conservation agency have agreed on a refuge which covers 40% of the previous shooting area. A permit scheme limits the level of shooting and ensures that only responsible persons are allowed to hunt.

Hunting and game management can be beneficial to non-game species, as well as increasing the numbers of game birds, as shown in UK and Danish examples. Biodiversity has also increased.

Danish wetland SPAs

A reserve network is being established which will protect vulnerable populations as well as providing sites for waterfowl staging and wintering.

A disturbance-free area is supplemented by a zone where certain recreational activities and hunting are regulated.

Hunting opportunities will improve outside refuges as the number of birds increases (“win-win scenario”).

A local user group was set up to give advice on boundaries, zonation and regulations. Public hearings are held and an arbitration procedure is available. This group meets annually with the Forest and Nature Agency.
Communications and awareness raising

The value of Natura 2000

Do people understand the objectives of Natura 2000? They may not see it as a network, which could fail if one part is not realised.

The conservation objectives must be in the forefront, and should be clear and simple.

The potential benefits of the conservation measures to the local people should be clear – better environment, job opportunities, sense of purpose and achievement.

Appeal to local aspirations – economic, ethical, quality of life – as well as conservation

Key Points

What do we want to communicate?
• the value of nature conservation
• the objectives of the Natura 2000 network
• the relationship between Natura 2000 and local nature values.

With whom do we want to communicate?
• Local actors and stakeholders whose support is vital for the successful implementation of the project.

How can we best communicate?
• Adapt the level of detail to the target group. Sometimes simple messages are the best
• Ensure that local people adopt the project as their own
• Harness local interests, concerns, aspirations on economic, environmental and ethical issues
• Reflect values that are honest, transparent, simple, attractive
• Be proactive as well as reactive.

Case studies

The Austrian Bear project depends on public acceptance – no other factor is as decisive for the successful protection of this small population. The project therefore focused on building structures which allow locals to always have a contact person in case of any kind of bear problem (“bear advocates”), who give guidance in handling of bears. This gives security in case of damage (compensation) and in case of appearance of nuisance bears (security of people has absolute priority, should humans be endangered, offending bears will be shot). All of this was communicated by various means (high media attention) and gave confidence to people that the protection agencies are present and responsive to public concerns.

Navigating with Nature demonstrates the value of targeted information. School children respond to and learn from simple well-presented publicity material. Young adults benefited from an environmental award training scheme. Boat owners need clear guidance on the effects their actions may have on the local environment. A waste management demonstration project was helpful. General information such as bird identification charts increase public interest in conservation.

Protecting birds and jobs in the Yyteri peninsula of Finland shows the value of personal contacts in a congenial atmosphere, avoiding an impression of officialdom. It is important to consult the local people in advance, and to respond to their concerns. Most people react well to a discussion with someone they feel they can trust. Willingness to compromise is important.

Who are the local actors?

Positive efforts must be made to identify the target audience.

People who are accidently left out may become active opponents.

Early consultation and involvement is essential. Unforeseen interest groups may emerge during the early stages.

Do not assume that everyone has the same concerns – different groups may be identified which require different approaches.
Ways of communicating

Different methods of putting over the information should be used:
- Formal meetings
- Direct contacts
- Schools contacts
- Written material
- Press releases
- Videos
- Visitors Centres
- Internet
- Multimedia

Choose the method according to the target group

Work through interest groups as well as individuals
- Local government
- Education authorities
- Co-operatives
- Lobby and representational groups
- Youth groups
- Conservation action groups

Too much detail may be counter-productive. Keep it simple!

Actions should be evaluated. Surveys help in assessing the value of different initiatives. Pre-paid coupons and incentives to reply, such as free tickets to a related event, will increase the response rate.
Management plans involving local actors

**Partnerships**

People must feel involved, and that their opinion counts.

Working parties which involve interest groups, eg hunters/fishers/farmers/land owners, bring people together and facilitate co-operation for a common goal.

The general public also has a part to play, and can make useful allies.

Consultation should take place regularly, especially if there is a change in plans.

Training courses can reinforce the commitment and co-operation between different groups.

**Mediators**

The role of intermediaries was highlighted in the three projects. These can participate, for example, in local committees, advisory groups, and public meetings.

Locally elected representatives, usually have particularly good credibility with the local people.

Project officers should also play a mediating role.

Scientists are not always the best people to put over an argument. It may help to use people with specialised communications skills, eg local journalists.

**Conservation measures for UK marine SACs**

The way the message is conveyed is as important as the message itself. A message from the peer group carries more weight than one from official sources.

For example, in marine SACs in the UK, an information brochure produced by their own association had a good effect on the attitudes of the yachtsmen.

The timing of the messages is also important. Too fast, and the measures seem to have been imposed; too slow, and delays cause frustrations.

**Preserving the natural heritage of Drugeon**

Foundation work is needed before a management plan is drawn up, to understand the technical requirements and the land use distribution.

In this project, land registers showed that 80% of the area was in common ownership. Ecologically interesting common land was given priority, as there was easier access.

Financial incentives gave the best motivation for farmers and politicians.

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**Key Points**

All local stakeholders should be involved at an early stage, and in all phases of the process.

Involvement of locally elected representatives and dedicated project managers is crucial for the successful interaction between stakeholders.

Not everyone is a good communicator. People with specific communication skills should be used.

The exercise should be a real partnership, taking into consideration the concerns of all parties, with everyone willing to compromise.

The process of involving local stakeholders requires considerable resources, both of time and money.

**LIFE** funding is useful for initiating projects or for capital investment. However, for long term conservation efforts, other sources of funds should be used to ensure that the development is sustained in the future.

The best source of messages is the peer group ie the “bottom-up” approach.

There must be lasting financial incentives for the local people. Ideally, the local actors should have a financial stake in the project themselves.
Key Points

Change is a fact of life on Natura 2000 sites. It comes from a variety of sources, including natural change, development and restoration.

Article 6 of the Habitats Directive provides an innovative mechanism for dealing with change and a framework for balancing ecological and socio-economic interests.

Some of the concepts in Article 6 are poorly understood and require further clarification in the light of experience.

Achieving the right balance between ecological and socio-economic interests might have a cost attached.

Public support, based on good information, is essential. Conflicts often arise because of lack of clear information.

Public acceptability could be the turning point. Do people value nature enough to pay more for water, food or houses? Do they see the opportunities?

There is a natural tendency to be against change, and a need therefore to show the benefits of change.

Natural change: Managing Coastal Processes

An eroding coastline presents management problems for the UK Environment Agency.

There are several options for action, but each brings its own problems. Removal of sea defences may benefit seaward Natura 2000 sites, but be detrimental to sites inside the existing defences. Retaining defences gives rise to coastal “squeeze”

Compensation will be required for landowners who lose property; this will mostly be for grazing land lost to the intertidal zone. However, other economic interests may influence decisions to protect threatened land.

Compensatory measures to replace lost freshwater habitats will also be necessary, and may be expensive.

Changes imposed by the Habitats Directive: The MARS project

Restoration of the Schelde estuary between Belgium and the Netherlands through the MARS project met with initial resistance. The estuary is the entrance to the port of Antwerp.

Increasing conservation awareness was seen as possibly damaging to economic development.

A communications strategy involving early consultation of all parties facilitated integration of the interests.

Intensive collaboration between ecology scientists and engineers with knowledge of the dynamics of a tidal estuary was essential.

Being a co-operative project between two countries, with financial support from the EC, contributed to the political recognition of the project. Demonstration of the value of the restored land as a water storage area which enhanced safety, nutrient transformation, sedimentation etc made convincing economic arguments for the project.
Financing management on Natura 2000 sites

Key Points

LIFE is the main specific instrument at EC level, and has proven to be a good catalyst for initiating projects and bringing together different partners. It can provide funds for land that has no intrinsic economic value.

LIFE does not provide long term funding. Other sources are needed to provide sustained financial incentives.

A broad range of other EC instruments can contribute, though their primary objective is not conservation, and they tend to be under-used.

Member States have done little to estimate the additional costs of implementing Natura 2000, particularly with respect to Article 8 of the Habitats Directive.

Greater efficiency can be achieved by co-ordinating actions under different instruments eg LIFE, Regulation 2078 and the Structural Funds.

Private initiatives and local funding help to increase awareness and complement public expenditure.

Products can gain added value by association with systems seen to be eco-friendly.

Financial autonomy should be the long-term aim.

Equitable distribution of resources to the different categories of stakeholders is important.

Effective and clear management plans help to indicate which activities can go ahead, and to optimise the use of resources.

Agenda 2000

The proposals made under Agenda 2000 will facilitate the integration of environmental policies into the Rural Development policy, if adopted by the Member States. Valuable support could be given to non-remunerative investments eg nature restoration.

The absence of a specific reference to Natura 2000 in the new Rural Development funds undermines people’s perception of the Union’s commitment to it.

The objectives of EC financial instruments can change, and should not be relied upon to provide long-term support.
RNOB – Birdlife, Belgium described how national restraints encourage conservationists to give priority to land purchase. This is expensive, and so it is necessary to find complementary sources of funds. Where possible, management of land is entrusted to the farmers, so that it is not removed from production but still contributes to income. This motivates farmers to contribute to conservation work, and reduces the RNOBs recurrent management expenditure.

The natural beauty of some regions attracts tourists, who contribute to the local economy. However, it is not always the conservation agencies and organisations which benefit financially – the hotels and shops may be the main beneficiaries.

RNOB has obtained Structural Fund support but the way the Fund objectives are interpreted by the regional authorities has caused some problems.

The Visitors Payback Scheme encourages the tourists to voluntarily contribute financially or in kind to assist in the conservation of the sites. Possible methods are supplements on bills, donations, subscriptions, memberships, sponsorships and merchandising.

The method used should be easy to do, and should be marketed heavily, with good attention to detail. Market research is important, and the income should be monitored to assess the methods value. Visitor feedback should be obtained through surveys and questionnaires.

The Rhon project showed how different instruments (LIFE, LEADER, ERDF/ESF, 2078) were used in synergy, starting from a comprehensive action plan supported by all regional authorities identifying all funding partners, to achieve the restoration and preservation of an open landscape dependent on specific kinds of grazing but threatened by abandonment of farming. This landscape is also one of the main attractions for tourists.

The project also stressed the importance of generating income from the land, which translated into sub-projects for marketing of specialist livestock products with clear brand labels, to build up networks where local farmers supply local hotels and restaurants catering for tourists and to train farmers into diversifying as nature tour guides.

Appropriate marketing will allow consumers/tourists to feel they are supporting nature when purchasing such products.

This project illustrates how LIFE can be a platform where different authorities managing different funds come together and contribute to a common goal, each according to his mission.
General conclusions

• People are part of Natura 2000, and must be made to feel as though they are members of the partnership from the beginning.
• The management requirements must be acceptable to the local people. This will happen only if jobs and income are maintained.
• Developments must also be economically sustainable.
• High priority must be given to communicating with the local people at all stages.
• People must be convinced of the value and importance of the measures.
• The “bottom-up” approach, i.e. where the initiative is taken by people from one or more local interest group is most likely to succeed.
• A balance is needed between economic, social and ecological interests.
• Article 6 of the Habitats Directive provides an innovative mechanism for management of change and a framework for the balancing of ecological and socio-economic interests.
• Management plans are excellent tools for dealing with change.
• LIFE Nature is an important catalyst for the setting-up of projects.
• Existing EC financial instruments are not fully exploited. They can be complementary to each other but their use is often not properly co-ordinated.
• Other longer term sources of funds should be used to ensure continuation of the project.
• Resources must be committed to meet the costs of involving local people.
• Reforms in the CAP etc should be used for better integration of environmental and other policies.

Success depends on the ability to
• get peoples’ attention
• stimulate their interest
• create in them a desire to be involved
• get them to take action.

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