



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

PRESS RELEASE

15 May 2017

21st May is European Natura 2000 day

What started as a grassroots initiative through an EU funded [LIFE project in Spain](#) is now becoming an official European day. In a [ceremony today](#) Commissioner for Environment, Karmenu **Vella**, Chairwoman of the European Parliament's Environment Committee, Adina-Ioana Valean, First Vice-President of the Committee of the Regions, Karl-Heinz Lambertz, and Neil Kerr, Deputy Permanent Representative of Malta signed a [joint declaration](#) to proclaim 21st May as the "[European Natura 2000 Day](#)", Europe's network of protected areas. It will be celebrated annually across Europe.

Already this year hundreds of local events and networking activities across Europe will mark this special day for nature.

Karmenu **Vella**, Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, said: *"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 the co-operation among all our Member States".*

With the proclamation of the European Natura 2000 Day the European Commission has fulfilled its first pledge from the recent [Action Plan for nature, people and the economy](#). It was adopted on 27 April in response to thorough evaluation of the [Birds and Habitats Directives](#). One of the four priority areas of the plan is better communication and outreach, engaging citizens, stakeholders and communities.

Today also saw the launch of the next round of the [European Natura 2000 Award](#). This is another Commission initiative dedicated to rewarding excellence in the management and promotion of the network and raising awareness about Natura 2000 and its benefits to European citizens. The winners of the 6 Award categories will be revealed on next year's European Natura 2000 Day.

In addition to preserving Europe's natural heritage, the network contributes between 1.7 and 2.5% to EU GDP through the provision of ecosystem services such as carbon storage, water purification, pollination and tourism.

Background

The two EU Nature Directives – the Birds Directive (1979) and Habitats Directive (1992) are the cornerstone of the EU's biodiversity policy. They were subject to a **'Fitness**

Check' which provided an overall performance evaluation of their effectiveness and efficiency as part of the Commission's Regulatory Fitness and Performance (REFIT) programme. The [Fitness Check](#) engaged all stakeholders, including a positive mobilisation of over 550 000 citizens expressing support for the Directives through the Commission's public consultation – a record level of responses. The Commission's [Conclusions on the Fitness Check of the Birds and Habitats Directives](#) were published on 16 December 2016.

The **LIFE programme** is the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action. The general objective of LIFE is to contribute to the implementation, updating and development of EU environmental and climate policy and legislation by co-financing projects with European added value.

For More Information

[Action Plan for nature, people and the economy](#)