



Natura 2000

The 1979 Birds Directive and the 1992 Habitats Directive are two key instruments for the conservation of wild species and their habitats in the European Community. The Habitats Directive provides a framework for the establishment of the "Natura 2000", which will include a range of important and threatened habitats, including sites already designated under the Birds Directive.

The **Habitats Directive** introduced the obligation to preserve habitats and species of Community interest. Each Member State is responsible for identifying and designating as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) sites which are important for the protection of the species and habitats covered by the Directive.

1. The first step in the designation process is a scientific assessment at national level of each habitat or species of Community interest. On this basis the sites can be identified and proposed in the form of national lists presented to the European Commission. The sites are preselected on the basis of common criteria.

2. The second stage, with the support of the Nature Topic Centre of the European Environment Agency, is the identification of the Sites of Community Importance which will form the Natura 2000 network. The selection is done by the European Commission in collaboration with the Member States. Each site proposed on a national list is evaluated on the basis of its relative value, its importance as a migratory route or transboundary site, its total surface area, the co-existence of the various types of habitat and species concerned, degree of representativity, etc. The European Commission can also suggest adding additional sites to the list, if it can be scientifically demonstrated that the site is essential for the preservation of habitats or species covered by the Directive. After discussion with the Member State concerned, the final unanimous decision on selecting the Sites of Community Importance rests with the European Union's Council of Ministers.

3. When a site is selected as a Site of Community Importance, the Member States must designate it as a Special Area of Conservation within six years. The sites which are most endangered or most important for conservation must be designated first. This six-year period should be used by the Member States to gradually introduce the measures required to conserve and manage the sites.

The **Birds Directive** also provides for the designation of sites, Special Protection Areas (SPAs) to conserve the habitats of the most endangered bird species as well as for migratory bird species. Particular importance is given to the conservation of wetlands. However, all the sites are designated as SPAs in a single stage. They are then directly incorporated into the "Natura 2000" network. The conservation aims are similar to those of the Special Areas of Conservation.

The preservation of biodiversity in the designated sites may require human activities to be maintained or encouraged. The purpose of the Natura 2000 network is therefore not to create nature sanctuaries where all human activity will be systematically excluded. For instance, some types of meadow have to be mown or grazed so that they do not become

fallow, which would lead to the disappearance of certain endangered species. However, human activities must remain compatible with the conservation aims of the designated sites. Article 6 of the Directive obliges the Member States to establish conservation measures. Management plans, specifically designed for the sites concerned or integrated into other development plans seem to be the best way of achieving this. Each Member State is free to choose the method and type of measures to be taken. Whether statutory, administrative or contractual, they must prevent any deterioration of the site and if necessary restore them.

The European Community Biodiversity Strategy

The Community **Biodiversity Strategy** provides the framework for developing Community policies and instruments in order to comply with the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The basis is provided by the Article 6 of the CBD that specifically requests each party to “develop national strategies, plans or programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity or adapt for this purpose existing strategies, plans or programmes which shall reflect, *inter alia*, the measures set out in this Convention relevant to the Contracting Party concerned”.

The Biodiversity Strategy aims to identify gaps in the European Community conservation policy, and to promote biological diversity into the policies of the Community, complementary to strategies, programmes and plans of the Member States, in order to ensure the full implementation of the CBD. The relevant obligations of the CBD for the European Community are set out in section II of the strategy, in the context of four major themes. The objectives to be achieved in the context of the relevant Community policies (natural resources, agriculture, fisheries, forests, tourism, energy and transport, regional policies and spatial planning, development and economic cooperation) and instruments in order to meet these obligations, are specified in section III.

The implementation of the CBD by the Community calls for a two-step process. The adoption of this strategy containing the general policy orientation is the first step. The second is the development and implementation of **Biodiversity Action Plans** and other measures by the Commission through its services responsible for the policy areas concerned. This second step enables to translate into concrete actions the objectives derived from the Convention.

Thus four Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) were adopted in 2001:

- Conservation of Natural Resources
- Agriculture
- Fisheries
- Economic and Development Cooperation

Currently a review of EU biodiversity policy aims to provide an assessment of the implementation, effectiveness and appropriateness of the EC Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans. A key output will be a delivery plan aimed at delivering the EU commitment to halt biodiversity loss (in the EU) by 2010 and to optimise the EU contribution to the Johannesburg target to significantly reduce the rate of (global) biodiversity loss by 2010.

As an important milestone in the process, a stakeholder conference entitled Biodiversity and the EU - Sustaining Life, Sustaining Livelihoods took place under the auspices of the Irish Presidency of the European Union between 25-27 May in Malahide, Ireland. The result of the

conference is a document called "Message from Malahide" setting priority objectives and targets, as well as the endorsement of the first set of biodiversity headline indicators and the Killarney Declaration on research priorities.

LINKS

DG Environment - Nature and biodiversity:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/home.htm>

Habitats Directive:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/nature_conservation/eu_nature_legislation/habitats_directive/index_en.htm

Birds Directive:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/nature_conservation/eu_nature_legislation/birds_directive/index_en.htm

The European Community Clearing House Mechanism - EC CHM: <http://biodiversity-chm.eea.eu.int/>

Biodiversity Strategy: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/docum/9842en.pdf>

Biodiversity Action Plans in the areas of Conservation of Natural Resources, Agriculture, Fisheries, and Development and Economic Co-operation: http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/pdf/2001/com2001_0162en.html