

Joint paper on the Action for Biodiversity in the EU and the Fitness Check of the Birds and Habitats Directives

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BatLife Europe, BirdLife Europe, Buglife-The Invertebrate Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation Europe, CEEweb for Biodiversity, ClientEarth, EUROPARC Federation, European Environmental Bureau (EEB), European Centre for Nature Conservation (ECNC), European Natural Heritage Foundation (Euronatur), Eurosite, Fern, Friends of the Earth Europe, Oceana, International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG), Planta Europa, Rewilding Europe, Societas Europaea Herpetologica, Society for Ecological Restoration (SER), Wetlands International and WWF European Policy Office (WWF EPO) share the view that:

1. Protection and restoration of nature in the European Union is of crucial importance.

Nature is our common heritage and sustains our life. We need to protect and restore nature in the EU for its intrinsic value and for the many benefits that it brings to us, such as food, clean air, water and climate change mitigation. It is estimated to be worth 200-300 billion EUR/year to the EU economy for the Natura 2000 network of protected areas alone, as well as millions of jobs that depend directly on nature¹.

2. The situation of nature in the European Union is alarming, and we have reached a critical point.

The European IUCN Red List assessments of several groups of species show that a large proportion of species, across major taxonomic groups are at risk of

extinction. The most important threats to biodiversity in the EU are agricultural intensification, abandonment of traditional land use practices on marginal land, overexploitation of forests, fisheries and other natural resources, destruction and modification of water bodies and coastal areas and invasive alien species.

3. Action for biodiversity is urgently needed. Biodiversity loss is irreversible. The EU has only a few years left to meet its commitments under the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the Convention on Biological Diversity. EU Member States also need to comply with EU legislation, including the Birds and Habitats Directive, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the Water Framework Directive to halt some biodiversity loss and restore certain habitats.

About the Fitness Check of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives

4. The Birds and Habitats Directives are fit for purpose.

They are delivering conservation benefits to EU natural habitats and species. Where these Directives have been implemented, they have proven to be effective tools for the protection of a large part of biodiversity in the EU, through the Natura 2000 network and through the protection of species in the wider environment. The Nature Directives have been instrumental in the recovery of many species. The establishment of the Natura 2000 network has brought about major improvements in the management of protected areas across the EU as well as concrete biodiversity improvements; this contrasts with generally more negative trends outside the Natura 2000 network.

5. Better implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives, as well as stronger integration of these directives with other complementary policies, like the Marine Strategy Framework Directive or the Water Framework Directive, **must be the first priorities of the EU in halting the loss of biodiversity.** Designation of Natura 2000 sites in the marine environment is far from complete, and Member States have still not put in place appropriate management measures for many sites.

6. There are therefore no strong reasons to update the EU Nature Directives including their Annexes now. It is pertinent now to focus on achieving progress towards reaching the objectives of the EU Nature Directives, rather than diverting scarce resources to other discussions like a potential amendment of the Annexes.

Action needed to halt the loss of biodiversity in the EU

- 7. Robust implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives must be achieved.** Coverage of the Natura 2000 network is still not complete – mainly in the marine environment –, and there are still frequent cases of illegal activities in Natura 2000 sites, directly deteriorating the status of protected features. Member States must improve the processes of designation, monitoring and management of Natura 2000. The Commission must also use the available means of enforcement such as freezing EU funds or applying for court injunctions.
- 8. The EU needs to invest in nature.** Roughly 6 billion EUR of dedicated EU and national funding for biodiversity², are needed in order to achieve a major improvement in the state of nature. Funding is needed for the management of the Natura 2000 network, for targeted conservation actions for threatened biodiversity in the EU, actions on Green Infrastructure and restoration of degraded ecosystems, and for monitoring the state of nature in the EU.
- 9. The EU must improve compliance with environmental legislation** through a new legislative proposal on Environmental Inspections to improve enforcement of existing legislation.
- 10. Support and develop improvements to the monitoring of wildlife, recording biological data and assessing status.** Identifying the components of biological diversity important for its conservation, and monitoring those components, form a basic foundation of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Gaps in knowledge about the current status of species and habitats are apparent in EU Red List Assessments and Article 17 reports. The EU should put greater emphasis and resources towards improving the gathering and collating of biological data and converting those data into outputs that will provide improved geographical focus of conservation action, a more taxonomically complete set of EU Red Lists, and more certain assessments of progress towards achieving conservation aims.
- 11. In line with the EU biodiversity strategy, Member States should speed up the restoration of 15% of degraded ecosystems.** In many EU Member States a large proportion of ecosystems has been degraded; restoration of ecosystems contributes to halting biodiversity loss, and safeguarding the ecosystem services that they provide.
- 12. The EU should roll out an EU wide network of Green Infrastructure (the TEN-G network).** Green Infrastructures is crucial to improve connectivity of the Natura 2000 network on land, which is essential to protect biodiversity in the face of climate change, and delivers a wide range of benefit for EU citizens, such as flood protection and recreational space.
- 13. The EU should tackle the threat of agriculture to biodiversity.** The EU should therefore reform its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to ensure that it adequately protects farmland biodiversity, specifically halting the further loss of grasslands and to restoring grasslands that have been lost. The CAP must clearly focus on providing better support to nature-friendly farming techniques and stop wasting tax-payers money on harmful subsidies. In the meantime, the Commission must take immediate measures to ensure full implementation of the Nature Directives on farmland in terms of species and habitats protection as well as appropriate management of Natura 2000 sites. At the same time the Commission should enforce the protection of environmentally sensitive grasslands, and the Member States must improve their implementation of grassland protection. The Commission should make Ecological Focus Areas (EFA) deliver better for biodiversity under the current CAP during the 2017 EFA review.
- 14. An EU Pollinator Initiative is urgently needed.** Pollinators are an important part of biodiversity. Many pollinators are threatened with extinction and pollination is a vital ecosystem service. Threats affecting pollinators are often a threat for other biodiversity. The EU Strategy must contain concrete actions to remove the threat of pesticides to pollinators and to halt the destruction of pollinator's habitat.
- 15. Member States should robustly implement the Water Framework Directive (WFD) to better protect rivers, wetlands and other water bodies.** Many waters are threatened by irrigation, overabstraction, navigation, pollution, barriers to fish migration and hydroelectric dams. The overuse and abuse of derogations and the non-implementation of economic aspects of the WFD should be addressed.
- 16. The EU must fully implement the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) to achieve Good Environmental Status of the marine environment by 2020.** The status of many marine species and habitats in the EU continues to deteriorate, and reversing this trend requires additional, specific measures beyond those included within the Nature Directives. The MSFD and the Nature Directives are clearly inter-related and their objectives are mutually supportive. However, the MSFD can also complement the Habitats Directive, for instance by protecting marine features beyond the scope of the Habitats Directive, and by building on the work done under Regional Seas Conventions.
- 17. Important pressures of diffuse pollution on biodiversity must be better addressed,** including through an ambitious implementation of the Nitrates Directive, a revision of the National Emissions Ceilings (NEC) Directive and an adequate implementation of relevant EU pieces of legislation such as the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive.

¹ ten Brink P., Badura T., Bassi S., Daly, E., Dickie, I., Ding H., Gantioler S., Gerdes, H., Kettunen M., Lago, M., Lang, S., Markandya A., Nunes P.A.L.D., Pieterse, M., Rayment M., Tinch R., (2011). *Estimating the Overall Economic Value of the Benefits provided by the Natura 2000 Network. Final Report to the European Commission, DG Environment on Contract ENV.B.2/SER/2008/0038. Institute for European Environmental Policy / GHK / Ecologic, Brussels.*

² Gantioler S., Rayment M., Bassi S., Kettunen M., McConville A., Landgrebe R., Gerdes H., ten Brink P. (2010). *Costs and Socio-Economic Benefits associated with the Natura 2000 Network. Final report to the European Commission, DG Environment on Contract ENV.B.2/SER/2008/0038. Institute for European Environmental Policy / GHK / Ecologic, Brussels 2010*