Natura 2000

ACRONYMS | AREAS | COUNTRIES | MARINE | TERMS

DEFINITION

A European network of protected sites under the European Habitats and Birds Directives, aiming to protect the most valuable and threatened European habitats and species.

DESCRIPTION

Natural 2000 is a European (EU 28) ecological network of terrestrial, coastal and marine protected areas aiming to protect the most valuable and threatened habitats and species across Europe. The Natura 2000 network is underpinned by two European Directives: the Birds Directive [1] and the Habitats Directive [2] which are collectively known as the Nature Directives. Under the Habitats Directive, Member States propose sites as Sites of Community Importance (SCI). Once the SCIs are accepted by the Commission, Member States must then designate them as legally protected Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). Under the Birds Directive, however, Member States can directly designate Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under their jurisdiction without having to be approved by the Commission. Collectively the sites designated under both Directives make up the Natura 2000 network.

For more clarification on SCIs, SACs and SPAs please see the individual factsheets.

The Natura 2000 network has achieved significant prominence in Europe. The Natura 2000 Networking Programme organise a series of training events, themed workshops and practical tools to promote Natura 2000, good practice in site management and the benefits of networking across Europe. The Natura 2000 network also features prominently in the EU biodiversity strategy to 2020 [3] which aims to halt biodiversity loss by 2020, partly by strengthening the Natura 2000 network.

SUPPORTED BY

European Commission and the 28 Member States of the EU.

YEAR OF CREATION

1992. This is an ongoing process with new sites being frequently added, particularly in the marine environment as well as by new EU Member States.

COVERAGE

Regional (European) network of terrestrial, coastal and marine areas. As of mid-2014 the network consisted of over 27,000 designated sites covering approximately 18% (of the land) of the 28 Member States of EU. [4]

CRITERIA

The Birds Directive requires the establishment of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for those birds listed in Annex I as well as regularly occurring migratory species. [1] The Habitats Directive similarly requires Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) to be designated for those habitat types and species listed in the relevant annexes of the Habitats Directives. [2] Together, SPAs and SACs make up the Natura 2000 network. For designations each Member State must compile a list of the best areas containing the habitats and species listed in the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive.

For the creation of SPAs, an assessment is made to determine the most suitable areas for the conservation of the species and sub-species listed in the Birds Directive as particularly threatened and in need of special conservation measures. These include: [1]

1. species in danger of extinction;
2. species vulnerable to specific changes in their habitat;
3. species considered rare because of small populations or restricted local distribution; and
4. other species requiring particular attention for reasons of the specific nature of their habitat.

In addition, SPAs are also designated for migratory birds and for wetland birds. Unlike the SACs of the Habitats Directive, member states can directly designate SPAs under their jurisdiction without having to be approved by the Commission. These sites are automatically incorporated into the Natura 2000 network.

For the creation of SACs, an assessment is made at the national level of the relative importance of sites for each natural habitat type and species listed in the Habitats Directive. For habitat type this assessment looks at: [2]

1. Degree of representativity of the natural habitat type on the site.
2. Area of the site covered by the natural habitat type in relation to the total area covered by that natural habitat type within national territory.
3. Degree of conservation of the structure and functions of the natural habitat type concerned and restoration possibilities.
4. Global assessment of the value of the site for conservation of the natural habitat type concerned.

For species, this assessment looks at:

1. Size and density of the population of the species present on the site in relation to the populations present within national territory.
2. Degree of conservation of the features of the habitat which are important for the species concerned and restoration possibilities.

3. Degree of isolation of the population present on the site in relation to the natural range of the species.
4. Global assessment of the value of the site for conservation of the species concerned.

Member states then submit their proposals to the Commission, which approves the sites as Sites of Community Importance (SCIs) after scientific consultation, based on the following criteria:

1. relative value of the site at national level;
2. geographical situation of the site in relation to migration routes of protected species and whether it belongs to a continuous ecosystem situated on both sides of one or more internal Community frontiers;
3. total area of the site;
4. number of natural protected habitat types and protected species present on the site; and
5. global ecological value of the site for the biogeographical regions concerned and/or for the whole of the territory, as regards both the characteristic of unique aspect of its features and the way they are combined.

It then remains the state's responsibility to designate the SCIs as legally protected SACs, within six years at most. The Commission separates the European environment into 9 biogeographical regions [5], in order to achieve the protection of a representative range of habitats.

MANAGEMENT

The Member States are responsible for ensuring that all Natura 2000 sites are appropriately managed by conservation authorities in each country, whether the land is of public or private ownership. This is often carried out in partnership with other authorities, voluntary bodies, local or national charities and private landowners. There is not any *a priori* prohibition of new activities or developments within Natura 2000 sites. These need to be judged on a case by case basis. There is a clear procedure in the Habitats Directive for assessment and subsequent decisions relating to development proposals that are likely to have an impact on designated sites. Sometimes certain activities have to be restricted or stopped where they are a significant threat to the species or habitat types for which the site is being designated as a Natura 2000 site.

Keeping species and habitats in good condition is not necessarily incompatible with human activities; in fact many areas are dependent upon certain human activities for their management and survival, such as agriculture. The European Commission invites partnership with small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) at the local level to support Natura 2000 sites in activities such as eco-tourism. Recent financial assessments estimate that the total benefits that flow from the Natura 2000 network are estimated to be in the order of €200 to 300 billion/year, which significantly outweighs the estimated costs of management and restoration of around €5.8 billion/year. [6]

BUSINESS RELEVANCE

Legal and compliance – Legal recognition and protection of these sites is necessary for inclusion in the Natura 2000 network. The protection of the sites is the responsibility of the Member States, who are obligated to comply with the directives by transposing them into national law, and any violation could result in legal action and penalties. These sites have high visibility across Europe, due to their recognition by the European Commission. There are no specific compliance requirements for business specified in the directives, however as part of EU policy, the Natura 2000 network and the Habitats and Birds Directives on which it is based are mentioned in the eligibility criteria for finance by the European

Investment Bank (EIB) [7], whereby projects are needed to protect or improve such areas. As areas that fall under international and national law, they are also included in the safeguard institutions of a number of other finance institutions and certification programmes that make specific requirements for operations in legally protected areas (see information on IUCN protected area categories for further information). The Natura 2000 network fulfils the EU's obligation towards the Convention of Biological Diversity.

Biodiversity importance - Natura 2000 sites are site-scale areas that are important for the protection of European species and habitats. The criteria for identification include both high vulnerability and high irreplaceability of species in a European context, although identification is not restricted to these criteria. All targeted species (birds and others) in addition to habitat types are listed within the Annexes of the Birds and Habitats Directives, respectively. Many areas are therefore of high biodiversity value and, as site-scale management units, of high relevance for business in terms of avoiding risk from biodiversity loss and identifying opportunity associated with biodiversity conservation.

Socio-cultural value – The criteria for designation of these sites do not explicitly mention social, cultural or economic values, however in managing the Natura 2000 network, EU governments must take account of economic, social and cultural requirements and regional and local characteristics. Human activities can therefore be expected within many of the sites, and for some may be a key component of their management. The European Commission particularly encourages the establishment of 'Pro-Biodiversity Businesses' within Natura 2000 sites, in an effort to promote economic development which will safeguard the conservation of biodiversity in these protected areas. [8]

REFERENCES & WEBSITE

1. European Commission. Website on the Birds Directive.
2. European Commission. website on the Habitats Directive.
3. European Commission. Our life insurance, our natural captial: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020. (2011).
4. European Commission. Natura 2000: EU funding opportunities for Europe's biodiversity. Natura Biodiversity Newsletter (2014).
5. European Commission. Natura 2000: Habitats Directive Sites according to Biogeographical Regions.
6. European Commission. Factsheet: The Economic Benefits of Natura 2000. (2013).
7. European Investment Bank. Environmental and Social Handbook. (2013).
8. Demeter, A. The European "Business and Biodiversity Initative."in International Conference on Business and Biodiversity (2008).



Snowdon in the Snowdonia SAC (Natura 2000 site), Wales, UK.

Len Green/Shutterstock.com

Category:

Protected areas

Related pages

Areas of Special Conservation Interest (Emerald Network) (ASCI) (Areas)

Site of Community Importance (SCI) (Areas)

Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (Areas)

Special Protection Area (SPA) (Areas)

Tools

Natura 2000 Public Viewer An online interactive GIS tool to explore the Natura 2000 network.

Biodiversity Data Centre Provides access to data and information on species, habitat types and sites of interest in Europe.

Protected Planet a tool for visualizing information on protected areas at the site level, country level, regional level and global level. This includes information on the IUCN category where known. Protected Planet brings together spatial data, descriptive information and images from the World Database on Protected Areas, WikipediaTM and PanaramioTM.

The Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) provides a visualisation and GIS download tool for protected areas, including the IUCN category where known.

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