

EUROPE'S NATURE LAWS MATTER

FOR BIODIVERSITY,
PEOPLE AND THE
ECONOMY



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Introduction

The Birds and Habitats Directives are praised for being some of the strongest pieces of nature conservation legislation in the world. Natura 2000, established by the Directives, is the world's largest network of protected areas, covering 18% of Europe's land and 6% of its marine areas.

The legislation has many advocates. There are the more obvious ones, such as birdwatchers and environmentalists, but there is also widespread support from more surprising places, such as farmers, hunters, drinking water providers and electrical grid operators, to name just a few featured in this publication. Many voices in the business community also defend what they consider to be a clear regulatory framework which they would like to see consistently applied across Europe, welcoming it as a pragmatic guide to sustainable development.

Through thorough but flexible rules on how land can be used and developed, these laws have not only had a positive impact on nature conservation they have also been beneficial to human well-being and the economy. Research shows that when properly implemented nature protection laws can both protect

biodiversity¹ and foster human activity². Natura 2000 is a laboratory for sustainable development which has created conditions that allow environmental, social and economic sustainability to thrive.

Some of the benefits of Natura 2000 areas can be expressed in monetary terms, particularly when it comes to ecosystem service benefits such as climate change mitigation, water provision and recreational benefits. The combined value of these multiple benefits for the whole of the Natura 2000 network has been estimated to be in the region of €200 – €300 billion a year. Yet this is only a fraction of the value of preserving Europe's unique natural heritage. Much of its value simply can't be captured or expressed in monetary terms. Many of us treasure moments spent in nature and don't cease to be amazed by its beauty and complexity. Most of us also hold the belief that generations to come should equally be able to enjoy the sound of flocks of cranes flying over on a misty autumn morning, the sight of lizards bathing on rocks in the afternoon sun and bats zigzagging above their heads on a warm summer evening.

Embracing nature protection is in the best interests of biodiversity, people, and the economy.



Through thorough but flexible rules on how land can be used and developed, these laws have not only had a positive impact on nature conservation they have also been beneficial to human well-being and the economy.

1. EEA (2015) State of Nature in the EU, URL: <http://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/state-of-nature-in-the-donald-et-al>. (2015) Assessing the Performance of EU Nature Legislation in Protecting Target Bird Species in an Era of Climate Change. Conservation Letters. DOI: 10.1111/conl.12196

2. EC (2013), The Economic benefits of the Natura 2000 Network URL : http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/financing/docs/ENV-12-018_LR_Final1.pdf

EU nature laws work for biodiversity

EU nature protection rules are the cornerstone of the EU's nature and biodiversity policy and, **where properly implemented, are starting to deliver impressive results.**

Many iconic species that were once on the brink of extinction such as sea eagles, cranes, wolves and beavers are making a comeback in Central and Western Europe, and migrating birds have an altogether less perilous journey over southern Europe than they did a couple of decades ago. Thanks to Natura 2000 sites and species protection provisions, 23% of animal and plant species protected under the legislation and 16% of their homes are in good conservation status. The **Nature Directives have made a significant contribution to delivering these results by raising the baseline for nature conservation efforts in many countries.** This effort has been boosted by, among other things, EU level enforcement, financing, guidance and support and through cooperation and exchange of best practice across national borders.

Kamil Antošová – Krkonoše National Park



It is important to recognise that the implementation of the Nature Directives is not finished – let's say we're half-way there.

Michael Hošek, Coordinator of International Relations at Krkonoše National Park, Czech Republic

What has been the added value of the introduction of the Nature Directives in your country? Are there any new and positive developments which would not have been possible without the Directives?

In the Czech Republic, the implementation of the Nature Directives was definitely a positive step forward. As a pre-accession condition, we had to transpose them into national legislation and in particular we had to establish the Natura 2000 network in a very short space of time (just four years). It was the first time that we carried out a comprehensive habitat type and species inventory in the whole country, and designated a network of protected areas based on national criteria. We also took advantage of the task and developed a Nature Conservancy Information System to support data storage and established regular field surveillance of habitat types and species of European importance. In a certain sense, this task professionalised nature conservation.

Do you see a pressing need to revise the Directives or are they still a relevant legal framework for the protection of nature today? What would it mean for you if EU nature legislation was to undergo significant changes over the next few years?

In my view, the Nature Directives are a well-developed and technically-based framework. It is important to recognise that the implementation

of the Nature Directives is not finished – let's say we're half-way there. Legislation was transposed and sites designated, but we still need to define conservation measures and implement them at site level. In fact, this is more demanding than what we have done so far. Therefore I see it as necessary to finish the process before thinking about reconsidering it. We spent a lot of time getting to where we are now so how could we convince stakeholders to participate in the future if the European Commission changes the legislation unsystematically and thus wastes our capacity? If the Nature Directives are open and changed significantly, it will harm not only nature conservation, but the integration of the European Union in general.

What is it that makes the nature in the protected area you are responsible for so extraordinary?

The Krkonoše Mountains form the highest mountain range in the Czech Republic. The uniqueness of the area is created by a mosaic of traditionally-used pastures and meadows together with very natural areas, such as spruce forests, peatbogs, and arctic-alpine tundra. The existence of arctic-alpine tundra makes the mountains a very special, isolated place of the northern and alpine type in the middle of Europe.



Frans Van Zijdweld, Manager at the Natura 2000 Kalmthoutse heide site, The Netherlands

Has the introduction of European level nature legislation, and more specifically the establishment of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas, changed the way you work? If so, how?

I am the manager of a Natuurmonumenten-owned and managed site in the cross-border Natura 2000 area, De Zoom – Kalmthoutse heide. As the park straddles the Belgian-Dutch border, Flemish and Dutch partners are working together on recreational zoning, joint projects funded by the EU LIFE programme, and to synchronise administrative procedures. Natura 2000 and LIFE have led to increased cooperation with our Flemish neighbours, such as the NGOs Natuurpunt and GO INBO.

Natuurpunt and Natuurmonumenten strive for the most natural processes wherever appropriate. Many of the projects we undertake, including LIFE projects, aim to re-establish dynamic and natural processes in line with existing Guidelines on Wilderness in Natura 2000. In our case this has, for example, helped to bring back dynamic shifting sands to our land dunes.

Natura 2000 also provides a framework for doing business. At Kalmthoutse heide we have an agreement with the water companies Evides and Pidpa to gradually reduce the extraction of drinking water, and, in order to protect the marshland, the companies have constructed a temporary pipeline to transport the water supplies. Excessive nitrogen deposits on our

nature reserve are another serious threat. European regulations have drawn attention to the problem and the need for action. Whether the measures being taken are sufficient remains to be seen, but at least something is being done.

Do you see a pressing need to modernise EU nature legislation?

In the Netherlands, Natura 2000 areas must have management plans that outline the measures to be taken and to ensure that any planned activity does not have any negative impacts. Further, these measures must explain how the area can gain a favourable conservation status. However, many areas have only recently been designated and few have final management plans. We now need to get serious with implementation – the only problem with the Birds and Habitats Directives is a lack of implementation and enforcement, when the Directives are upheld as intended, nature really benefits.

What would it mean for you if EU Nature legislation was to undergo significant changes over the next few years?

The transposition of European nature protection laws into Dutch law and policy, as well as the designation of areas and the development of management plans, has taken a tremendously long time, about 25 years in total. During this time, there has been much uncertainty causing action on urgent issues to be postponed. Rumours about the protection rules and measures possibly being reversed and what

would be allowed in or around Natura 2000 areas damaged public support for nature conservation. That is why I hope that the Directives will not be modified, even if certain changes could, at least theoretically, result in better protection for some species or habitats.

What is it that makes the nature in the protected area you are responsible for so extraordinary?

Nature spreads across land boundaries; nature pays no attention to national borders. Here we

“ The only problem with the Birds and Habitats Directives is a lack of implementation and enforcement. Natura 2000 provides a framework for doing business. ”

have borderless nature which is managed by different countries in agreement with each other across these borders. It is here in fact that you can still see vast stretches of nature with scenic views (without landscape pollution) within a relatively small area, with a variety of plant and animal species. These are areas where people can, without compromising their conservation, still experience real silence and darkness in a busy part of Europe, an increasingly scarce value which benefits both recreation seekers and nature.



Jean-Louis Joseph, President of the French Federation of Regional Nature Parks, France

Could you briefly explain what kind of natural parks you represent and how they relate to Natura 2000?

The 51 French Regional Nature Parks (PNR), covering 15% of French territory, are inhabited areas which are recognised at national and even international level for the quality of their natural, cultural and landscape heritage. The objective pursued in these areas is to combine conservation and enhancement of the heritage with an innovative planning and economic development policy. Thanks to their experience in facilitating dialogue between stakeholders and the multidisciplinary of their staff, PNRs play a key role in implementing Natura 2000 in France.

What has been the added-value of the Directives in light of what was already being done in France before their introduction? Are there any new and positive developments which wouldn't have been possible without the Directives?

Having such legislation at the European scale has facilitated the implementation of programmes such as LIFE and Interreg, in particular between cross-border Natura 2000 sites. Nature knows no borders and the exchange of knowledge and experiences between people of different cultures is always enriching. The Directives have boosted the conservation of biodiversity since the early 2000s. Local actors have become more conscious that their natural heritage is not only of

local value, but in fact of European value. Many very positive measures for biodiversity have been taken. For example, impacts on biodiversity now carry more weight in impact assessments in France. This probably would not have happened without a little European “pressure”. This is not always perceived very positively and still needs some getting used to, but developers are starting to realise, at times somewhat painfully, that it is important to support the conservation of ecosystem services and their integration, right from the onset, into their projects. The European scale of the policy allows for a better consideration of biodiversity in other strong EU policies, in particular the Common Agricultural Policy with the agri-environmental measures. The EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 alone would not have carried sufficient weight.

Is there a pressing need to revise the Directives or do you think they still offer a relevant legislative framework for nature conservation today?

Natura 2000 is still in its infancy and some problems still need to be overcome. However, they are not linked to the Directives themselves, but rather to the way in which these are interpreted and implemented at national level. For example, we would welcome having more room for taking into account the value or rarity of species at both regional and European level in implementing the Directives. In some cases the spatial coverage of Natura 2000 sites would benefit from being looked at again in order to

allow for more coherent action. This is true at cross-border sites, for example, when areas in which activities take place that have significant negative impacts on a protected area are not part of the network. Another example is when only some parts of a farm are designated as Natura 2000 sites – this does not really allow, in practice, for coherent agricultural management at the farm level. The work of regional nature parks would be simplified if Natura 2000 contractual tools (charters, contracts) could also be used for areas of ecological interest located outside the Natura 2000 network. Also, to help with the implementation of important measures

identified by local stakeholders and keep stakeholder dialogue alive, it is essential to find new co-financing, to further join up existing means and lighten administrative aspects. The network must also be seen as a springboard to stimulate the development of activities and job creation around the sites, while always keeping conservation objectives in mind. Beyond the necessary budgets for monitoring, awareness raising, restoration and agro-environmental measures, budget should also be foreseen for local development linked to the promotion of a preserved natural heritage.

“ The Birds and Habitats Directives have boosted the conservation of biodiversity since the early 2000s. ”



Bernd Töller

EU nature laws work for people and communities

As well as playing a crucial role in protecting Europe's most valuable natural heritage, **Natura 2000 sites provide a wide range of other ecosystem benefits and services to society, such as improving well-being and health and providing opportunities for recreation and education.** In addition, nature conservation is also a **source of income and generates local employment.** Protected areas and species have become many people's bread and butter. We must support economic activities which deliver benefits to biodiversity as communities play a crucial role when it comes to nature protection, indeed **many Natura 2000 sites are the result of a legacy of land use** which has helped create areas of high nature value. The Nature Directives allow for **human activities to co-exist alongside biodiversity** and many Natura 2000 areas have become laboratories for sustainable development, paving the way for a **better future in which people live in closer harmony with nature.**

Farming



Hannes Löschenkohl, Farmer, Austria

What opportunities has the designation of (some of) your land as a Natura 2000 site created for you?

The basis of any question should be: how much is my habitat worth to me? How much is my environment worth to me? How much do I value, for example, a European robin? Protection of the environment is the protection of oneself and I also see this as my duty to communicate this. To communicate in particular that nature conservation and economic profitability are compatible, that one is the condition for the other rather than one excluding the other. There is no economy without ecology and biology. It is not enough to live in a protected area. Behind this there is idealism and the awareness that as a human one is not the measure of all things but only a part of it.

I came up with the initiative of marketing our Natura 2000 area by creating new products. For example my organic hay beverage “Heukracherl” from the Natura 2000 area Mannsberg-Boden or my organic hay chocolate which I developed together with the chocolate producer Zotter. And I have many other ideas.

What measures do you believe could enhance the acceptability of Natura 2000 areas among farmers in Europe?

Honesty and transparency! I try to be the living example, through my products, that agriculture and nature conservation are compatible and I think that I have demonstrated it. Farmers should not be made to feel that someone wants

to take their land away from them. Instead, by involving farmers and valuing their knowledge, municipalities, regions, countries and the EU can find sustainable solutions for all stakeholders. In all honesty, it also has to be worth something and there should be higher compensation for additional efforts and forgone revenues for farmers when they take measures which favour nature and animals. If compensation is negligible, farmers are not going to act. While those who really do something should be rewarded it should also be clear that compensation should only be paid in exchange for effective delivery of a service. For me personally, nature conservation and organic agriculture are a philosophy and I was already practicing nature friendly farming before payments for it were introduced but not only does it make me happy to see more recognition for these efforts nowadays, I believe that in most places it will actually take compensation payments for agricultural practices to change. We also need awareness-raising from the farmer to the consumer so that people are more aware of where their food comes from.

Is there, from your point of view, a pressing need to change EU nature protection legislation (the laws which establish the Natura 2000 network)?

The Directives should be implemented in a farmer-friendly way – following the principle that if you do something good for nature which benefits us all you should be better off for it. The future does indeed look difficult from a financial perspective, but it will be even more

difficult if we don't become aware of our duties and responsibilities because we are just as responsible for what we do as for what we don't do. If we manage to anchor in people's minds that it is not the photographer who makes nature pretty and brings the cattle up the hill to the grazing grounds, but the farmer who cultivates his land, then we have won. Less bureaucracy, fewer inspections as well as rewarding those who enhance soil quality rather than those whose management practices exhaust soils in the long run are just a few of many possible approaches. Nature is an important objective that is worth fighting for. Let me come back to the value of a European robin – its value can't be expressed in monetary terms, but we will realise how much it's worth to us once it's gone. Only then, it will be too late.

// As a human one is not the measure of all things but only a part of it. There is no economy without ecology and biology. //



Tomas Halasz Greenpeace

Sabine Melmo Greenpeace

Farming



João Madeira, Farmer, Portugal

What opportunities has the designation of (some of) your land as a Natura 2000 site created for you?

I own a 860 ha farm which is entirely located in the Special Protection Area (SPA) 'Guadiana', in southwest Portugal. I mainly farm cows and sheep extensively. When the planning for the SPA was being discussed, there was some fear among farmers in the region that a 'culture of restriction' would be implemented. This was not the case, as it soon became clear to the authorities that the human activities here, mainly agriculture, are actually the basis of nature conservation. Since 2007, I've had the opportunity to access support measures provided to farmers as part of Natura 2000 from the Rural Development Programmes. The latest Rural Development Programme remunerates farmers, not for an additional cost or for a loss of income, but because they are subject to a set of restrictions which arise because their farms are located within the Natura 2000 network. I still think that if this support was better targeted and better reflected the reality of the situation farmers would adhere more to the measures.

Is there, from your point of view, a pressing need to change EU nature protection legislation (the laws which establish the Natura 2000 network)?

Although, in theory, it is always possible to improve existing legislation, I do not actually feel there is such a need. There is certainly a need to change the mindsets of all stakeholders involved in nature conservation. And when I say all, I mean all. From those who are on the ground – in this case the farmers – to those responsible for the interpretation and application of the rules, a role that in Portugal belongs to the Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests (ICNF), but also society as a whole. We should all fight the unfair idea that nature conservation is the responsibility of those who happen to be within the Natura 2000 network and as a result they should withstand all restrictions because it is a matter of collective interest. In my view it is the other way around: because it is a matter of collective interest, everyone should contribute to helping those whose responsibility it is to carry out nature preservation on the ground, so that they can do that protection work without any discrimination compared to another farmer. Naturally this means compensation for the financial and economic effects of these restrictions.

On this matter I also have to point out the vital role of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which allows farms, like my family's, which face particularly difficult soil and climatic conditions, to maintain their activity and continue making contributions to nature conservation and biodiversity.



// If support was better targeted and better reflected our reality, farmers would adhere more to nature protection measures. //

What measures do you believe could enhance the acceptability of Natura 2000 areas among farmers in Europe?

Acceptance is already quite good in many areas in Portugal. An important change that could even further increase acceptance would be to promote a social commitment that recognises the role of agriculture in nature conservation. Farmers as primary users of the territory need to be brought into the centre of this debate: society's recognition that farmers have a key role to play in nature conservation needs to increase. First of all, it is necessary to inform to tackle the stigmas which stick to an entire sector and that don't favour the involvement of farmers in this process which is so vital to the survival of our society. Only then can we move forward.



Rota Vicentina

Farming



Kurt Sannen, Farmer and Chairman of Bioforum Vlaanderen, Belgium

What opportunities has the designation of (some of) your land as a Natura 2000 site created for you?

Natura 2000 does not strike many farmers as attractive because they associate it with a loss of income and options for their farms but this is a shame as, in reality, Natura 2000 actually can result in a number of new opportunities. I became a farmer as I wanted to work on ways to combine farming and nature conservation. My farm is on a nature reserve in the Demer valley around Diest between Leuven and Hasselt, and I farm cattle and sheep. Without the cooperation of nature conservation organisations my farm would not exist as I started my farm around the same time that the nature conservation NGO Natuurpunt started a nature reserve here. From the beginning we worked together. The nature reserve contains grassland which needs

to be managed to reach nature conservation objectives. Nowadays my farm is 110 ha large, of which 100 ha are nature reserves with severe restrictions (grazing density, mowing time, no fertilizers etc.) and 10 ha are regular farmland.

Is there, from your point of view, a pressing need to change EU nature protection legislation (establishing the Natura 2000 networks)?

I would leave it as it is; if you open it up it risks being a Pandora's box – you don't know where things are going to end up. I'm happy that we have strong legislation but also know that the way it is currently implemented in Flanders denies opportunities to farmers

and results in pressure to make it more flexible. In Flanders land sparing is practiced which means that usually no farming takes place on nature reserves – but it doesn't have to be this way. Kicking people who live in and around Natura 2000 areas out isn't the solution; giving them opportunities to work with nature is of key importance. What I try to show with my farm is that there are ways for nature and farming to coexist. Other problems include the approach of the Flemish government in dealing with the impacts of nitrogen on Natura 2000 which isn't holistic enough and the limited consideration of ecosystem services such as good soil condition, pollination, protection against flooding, water protection and carbon sequestration. Species and habitat protection and conservation and enhancement of ecosystem services shouldn't be looked at in isolation. I would be happy if the implementation of European nature legislation

became more dynamic with respect to these things; without affecting the conservation objectives we should have more freedom on how these goals are achieved and all relevant stakeholders should be involved in such decisions. There is no urgent need to change EU nature protection legislation. There is a pressing need to change the way we implement it.

In your opinion, what measures could enhance the acceptability of Natura 2000 areas amongst farmers (organic or otherwise) in Europe?

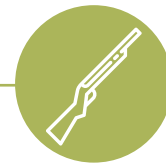
We need to make High Nature Value Farming more profitable so people can make a living out of it. They provide so much for society yet they are not rewarded for it. We want to be paid for the ecosystem services we provide – I provide a whole range to society without being paid for it and a lot of farmers do the same. Farmers all across Europe are finding it difficult to survive because our legislative environment isn't supportive enough. We need access to knowledge, information, and support from our governments. At the same time industrial intensive farms, which have a negative impact on ecosystem services, are paid more because they are more productive.

Above all, if you want farmers to cooperate in nature protection we need more respect. Conventional farming is not equal to industrial farming and there are a lot of non-organic farmers who are concerned about how things are developing and they are right to complain. Farmers don't want to ruin nature they are effectively forced to ruin it by an unfair unsustainable free market, they are victims, just like nature. Attempts to green the Common Agriculture Policy were unfortunately 'greenwashing', the CAP is pushing most farms to be factory farms. What we need is a real green CAP which stimulates medium-scale farms inspired by agro-ecological values. This is the best way for farmers and nature. With the organic farming group IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements) we are working on this.

“Opening up our nature laws risks being a Pandora's Box. There is no urgent need to change EU nature protection legislation. There is a pressing need to change the way we implement it.”



Hunting



Tim Russell, Director of Conservation, British Association for Shooting and Conservation, United Kingdom

How have the Nature Directives affected hunting?

The Nature Directives have added an extra requirement for the regulatory authorities to protect sites and the species that use them. This has caused additional burdens for some hunting groups around the British coast and in some uplands. For example, the appropriate assessment used to assess waterfowl hunting in coastal areas has been onerous and unnecessarily bureaucratic in England. The regulatory authorities of the other devolved UK countries, namely Wales and Scotland, have a much simpler system that is robust in terms of protecting habitats and wildlife. On the positive side the extensive conservation work carried out by hunting groups is now recognised as important to the sustainability of Natura 2000 sites. Clearly without proper protection and habitats management, species would decline and so would hunting opportunities.

Do you consider the constraints on hunting imposed by the Nature Directives unreasonable?

It is right that Natura 2000 sites receive the necessary protection to support the habitats and species using them. This is particularly important for people hunting migratory waterfowl. The constraints are not unreasonable, but in some places assessing the impact of hunting is unnecessarily bureaucratic. There can be no doubt that without the Directives there would be additional economic pressure for development on some important protected sites.

From a hunter's perspective – do you see a pressing need to modernise the Bird and Habitats Directives?

There is no need to modernise the Birds and Habitats Directives because they are both fit for purpose. Any change would risk bringing in a new system which would take a considerable amount of time to adapt to and may not provide the protection there is at the moment. With growing pressure to develop on protected sites the Nature Directives are vital.

What would it mean for you if EU nature legislation were to undergo significant changes over the next few years?

If the EU level nature protection laws were weakened I would be concerned about declines in migratory waterfowl populations. EU level protection ensures a coherent network of protected sites along the flyways of huntable migratory species. Without protection these important sites for nature and hunting would be vulnerable to exploitation for building, mineral extraction and other threats driven by economic need. If the EU's nature legislation were to undergo significant changes in the next few years I would be concerned that all the effort that has gone into protecting these important sites and the species that use them would be lost.



Beekeeping



Francesco Panella, Beekeeper and President of BeeLife, Italy

Has the designation of Natura 2000 areas in your surroundings resulted in benefits for you, as a beekeeper?

In my case it is clear that if Natura 2000 protections were taken away it would mean I would have to stop working altogether. I say this because despite working in a Natura 2000 area there is still frequent pesticide contamination. I can't make pollen if fungicide has been sprayed within a kilometre of where I work. The spread of pesticides is simply too difficult to control. I've had to abandon pollen before because it was so contaminated with pesticides. Looking at bee pollen is actually an excellent barometer of how healthy biodiversity is. Looking at chemicals present in water also helps understand how effective nature protection mechanisms are and where the pressures come from. A 2014 report from Italy's Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) showed that the second most-frequent molecule found in water is the systemic insecticide imidacloprid which has been banned on corn in Italy since 2008. This tells us that contamination with harmful chemicals is still happening, even in protected areas, so I don't want to imagine how bad it would be without existing restrictions resulting from European nature legislation.

"I no longer see the birds I saw before. I want my sons to see the birds I used to see."

Do you see a pressing need to modernise EU nature legislation?

When we talk about modernising the laws we need to be careful about how we measure and assess their effectiveness. I'm not entirely surprised that the objectives of the laws may not have been achieved. Just having the legislation in place is not enough if there are no controls or penalties. While there is quite a lot of advice and recommendations on how to make the laws work it is also necessary to control and punish when the rules are ignored. I am still worried about the fact that we have not seen significant improvements. I'm 63 years old and I'm lucky to have lived in the countryside for 40 years, but I no longer see the birds I saw before – I only see predators or birds who can survive in urban environments. I want my sons to see the birds I used to see.



Greenpeace – Juraj Ryznar

Health



Assoc. Prof. DI Dr. Hans-Peter Hutter, Austrian Section of ISDE (International Society of Doctors for the Environment), Medical University Vienna, Austria

How important are nature and biodiversity for people's well-being and health?

There is no doubt: nature and biodiversity can't be separated from the existence of human beings. Our health and well-being strongly depends, both directly and indirectly, on the ecosystem services provided by nature. These are the basis for our most basic human needs, namely clean air, clean water and fertile soil.

For multiple ecosystem services to work in harmony we need healthy biodiversity. It is also obvious that human health is directly linked to the well-documented and ever faster loss of biodiversity. The alarming evidence for the consequences of the loss of biodiversity are unfortunately numerous.

In other words, the conservation of biodiversity should also be seen as a contribution to the conservation of human health. Nature can also have therapeutic applications. A stay in nature also needs to be seen as promoting health by reducing stress and supporting recovery.

Do you think protected areas have a role to play in promoting public health?

Yes, most certainly, particularly when it comes to physical activity and recreation (physical, mental and spiritual) in nature. Such a 'retreat area' can play an important role. A prerequisite for sustainable use of nature is access via good and efficient public transport links.

Does a biodiverse Natura 2000 site deliver higher public health benefits than, let's say, a very artificial green space?

If by "very artificial" you mean cleared, monotonous green spaces with a "Disneyland" impression which can only "survive" due to significant efforts in terms of energy, water use and pesticides, I think I do not need to say much more about it. Experiencing nature and the wonderful uniqueness of different biodiversity rich ecosystems is of great importance from a public health perspective.

One aspect is of particular concern in this context. In my experience as an evaluator in environmental medicine who has been involved in different project approval procedures, I've seen that Natura 2000 areas are still not taken seriously enough in the case of construction projects. The high value of such areas tends to be insufficiently taken into account in the process that leads to the approval of projects such as the building of roads or highways. Public authorities and policy makers must take biodiversity, and in particular clearly-designated areas, much more seriously than they are doing at the moment.

Our health and well-being strongly depends, both directly and indirectly, on the ecosystem services provided by nature.



Local government



Francisco Duarte, President of Castro Verde municipality, Portugal

How does Natura 2000 make a positive difference to your community?

Castro Verde is a 567 km² municipality in Southern Portugal which is home to about 7300 habitants. Ninety percent of the territory is designated as a Special Protection Area 'Castro Verde' and about 1% as a Special Protection Area 'Piçarras'. In our municipality we needed to find a way to link nature protection to our daily lives and Natura 2000 made us look at our environment, nature, and particularly birdlife in a totally different way from before. Care for these values started to seep into activities in our schools, in some of our local civil society associations and in the municipality itself. This helped to create new habits, new ways of understanding our rural world, and above all, it helped inspire young people to think differently about nature.

What opportunities has Natura 2000 created for local people?

I believe that recent years have been very important for the community due to the diversification of activities, increased use of our resources, and the opportunities that Natura 2000 has directly or indirectly brought us. This is seen very clearly in the agricultural sector, where work to protect some species and the promotion of those projects has brought new forms of income to our municipality, as well as new civic conscience, and new projects that are complementary to agriculture. For instance, we have several new rural tourism projects whose businesses are based on opportunities for bird watching and nature tourism in this region.

Another example of indirect profit to our community is a mining project in a mining area that we call 'Minas de Neves Corvo', which has been following much higher standards due to the fact that it is in a Natura 2000 area.

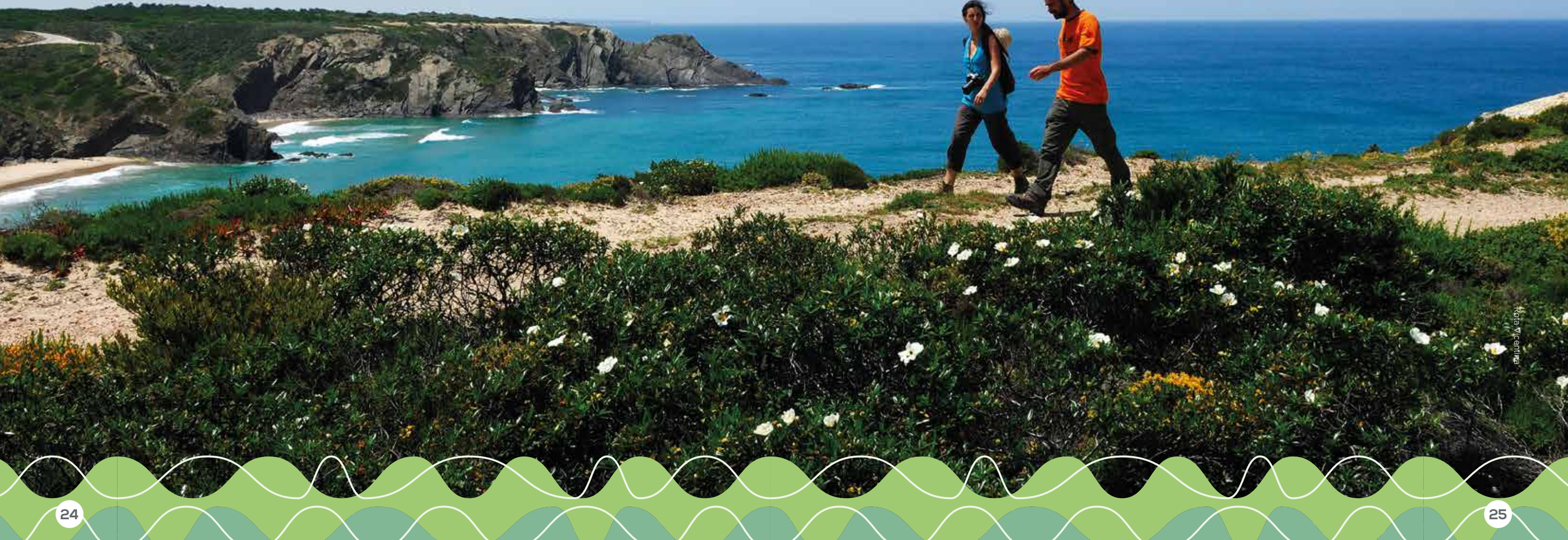
What would it mean for your community if nature protection laws were weakened?

I believe that our territory and community would lose a lot. We would lose economically, socially and civically. Natura 2000 classification brought us projects and financing which brought young professionals to this region, it brought economic advantages to our farmers and a new civic consciousness to our community. It put a value on the biodiversity that we have in the municipality. Any rolling back of our nature protection laws would be extremely negative and threaten the work that has been done here over the last decades. It is important that legislation linked to the region takes human activities into account. In our case this is very important as our ecosystem is dependent on agriculture that has been practiced here for centuries. Therefore it is important that we receive compensation to allow us to protect our biodiversity which should be the very basis of sustainable development against human desertification and rural abandonment.



EU nature laws work for the economy

The **stable and consistent protective framework provided by European nature legislation benefits businesses**, both big and small. **Consistent implementation and enforcement of the rules** helps predictability, and common interpretation of the rules across different countries **helps companies that operate across different borders**. The **preservation of unique natural assets and landscapes can turn into a region's selling point, driving the growth** in the tourism sector and thus creating new employment opportunities in sometimes remote, rural areas. Natura 2000 sites are drivers of local and regional economies across Europe and to maintain this success we must **capture the multiple benefits the network delivers by improving implementation of the Directives and investing in restoration**.



Drinking water supplier



Peter Spierenburg, Nature and customer relations manager at Dunea, The Netherlands

Your company provides water users with clean drinking water. What is the link between water and Europe's nature conservation legislation?

Dunea supplies drinking water to 1.2 million people in the west of The Netherlands and manages Natura 2000 protected sites in the dune area. The dune area is a key element in the drinking water production process. Pre-treated surface water is used to recharge the aquifer that is used for drinking water production. Natural processes are used to provide clean and reliable drinking water. The production process is integrated in the dunes in such a way that the area supports a rich biodiversity and high quality habitats. Four drinking water companies manage 60% of the Natura 2000 areas in the mainland dunes and bear a particular responsibility for rare and vulnerable habitats such as grey dunes and humid dune slacks.

Europe's nature conservation legislation strengthens the protection of these areas as a drinking water source and as a natural area supporting a rich biodiversity. The legislation allows for tailor-made solutions by which synergies between drinking water production and nature conservation are strengthened.

How does the designation of protected areas as part of the Natura 2000 network make a positive difference to your sector?

The dune areas have long been protected as sources of drinking water. Urbanisation and other

developments have been successfully countered. Natura 2000 designation now provides a stronger, double protection that will safeguard these areas for the future. The areas will continue to provide important services to society such as drinking water, recreation and biodiversity, despite the fact they are located in a highly urbanised and dynamic environments.

The dunes are a good example of how Natura 2000 areas provide strong protection for aquifers which are important for drinking water production. The aquifers are well protected against pollution and activities that could create risks. Natural processes contribute to buffering of volumes and eliminating pathogens in such a way that little additional treatment is needed. At the same time, the need for clean sources of water provides a strong incentive to improve surface water quality, which also benefits biodiversity conservation. Environmental requirements for drinking water and nature go hand-in-hand. The Natura 2000 objectives also provide a clear reference point for the efforts of drinking water companies to combine drinking water production with high quality nature management. The Natura 2000 status helps to communicate successes and to set ambitions.

What opportunities has Natura 2000 created for the provision of water?

The Natura 2000 status of areas demonstrates that it is possible, and mutually beneficial, for the provision of drinking water and nature conservation to work in harmony. This helps us to go beyond a sectoral approach to nature conservation and look for opportunities in and



// Natura 2000 areas provide strong protection for aquifers which are important for drinking water production. //

around the Natura 2000 network for new solutions with benefits for both drinking water and biodiversity. For our customers the Natura 2000 status reaffirms that drinking water companies are reliable organisations that take good care of the vulnerable nature areas entrusted to them. The vast majority of Dunea clients support our role and responsibilities when it comes to nature management.

What would it mean for water if nature protection laws were weakened?

Drinking water companies need practical nature protection laws which provide opportunities

to find solutions which strengthen synergies between biodiversity and other important functions for society such as drinking water. Practical laws are not necessarily weaker laws. Laws need to be strong where it comes to protecting the integrity of the areas reserved for nature and important associated functions such as drinking water. Laws need to be practical where it comes to allowing space for innovation for organisations with a strong drive to combine high quality nature conservation with other important societal functions.

Wind energy provider



Asbjørn Bjerre, Danish Wind Turbine Owners' Association, Denmark

Does the existence of common nature protection rules at the European level make a positive difference to your sector?

Nature protection rules have an indirect positive effect on our work in the wind turbine sector as they complement our goals. Nature conservationists and the renewable energy sector have a common interest in protecting the environment. I think that having European nature protection laws which seek to protect wildlife and biodiversity across Europe is really positive. Just as wind energy is an essential form of clean energy, which can help protect our planet, nature protection laws can help safeguard our natural landscapes and endangered species. However, despite these shared values, conflicts between nature conservation and wind power development can and do arise. Even though they produce clean energy, wind turbines still have to be put somewhere and this can cause problems for nature conservation so it is helpful to have clear procedures in place which help find solutions so that wind power development can happen in a way which minimises the impact on the natural environment. In this context it is good for us to know that wind power operators across Europe have to play by the same rules, ensuring a level playing field for wind power generation all across Europe.

Would you say the existence of a common set of rules and more specifically the establishment of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas facilitates the development of wind power in Europe rather than imposes additional constraints on your sector's expansion?

The legislation poses no specific restraints on our sector. What I would say is that it would be better if the rules were interpreted and implemented in a way that allows for projects to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. A decision as to whether or not a wind turbine can go in a particular place should not be taken solely by looking at a map. A pragmatic approach calls for going out and looking at the situation on the ground. Sometimes putting a wind turbine in a particular space would not hinder nature protection, even on a Natura 2000 site. It is not always black and white and we consider that, when done correctly, putting a wind turbine in place can be done in harmony with conservation objectives. That said, I respect the objectives for which the laws have been introduced as nature protection is of fundamental importance and I recognise that for them to be effective rules and restrictions are needed.



Peter G W Jones

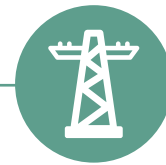
// Nature protection rules have an indirect positive effect on our work in the wind turbine sector as they complement our goals. //

Do you consider there is a pressing need to modernise EU nature legislation?

We are satisfied with current nature legislation and we don't want it to be looser than it is already. In Denmark some call for the laws to be more flexible, including in the government. We agree with nature organisations such as Danish Society for Nature Conservation (Danmarks Naturfredningsforening) who defend the laws and are working to keep them as they are. If the laws became more flexible it could mean they would no longer work for nature and that's a risk we can't take for the sake of our natural world.



Electrical grid operator



Oliver Feix, 50Hertz, Germany

Does the existence of common nature protection rules at the European level make a positive difference to your sector?

The development of the grid infrastructure linked to the energy transition in Europe always has an impact on nature and landscape in the affected regions. For 50Hertz, a key focus of grid planning is to optimise the line routes and locations of new substations while carefully considering all protected natural resources and minimising the impact on humans and nature during the project phase. German legislation based on European nature legislation helps us to do so. It gives guidance and pushes all grid operators to define suitable counter or compensation measures for nature.

As much as possible 50Hertz avoids crossing both densely populated areas and nature protected areas. On top of this, we put in place wildlife corridors and apply ecological corridor management wherever useful and define appropriate nature compensation measures to lower our global impact.

European nature legislation on bird protection is of huge importance to us because of the numerous European bird protection areas in our control area. Based on this legislation, 50Hertz takes various measures to support better protection for birds. We attach markings to the overhead earth wires, which considerably improve their visibility to birds and reduce the risk of collisions. As transmission towers also provide birds with additional nests, a welcome side effect of these towers is that the number of birds such as ospreys has substantially increased.

// There is no need to change existing European nature legislation. We have learnt to find solutions while looking for appropriate routings and appropriate technical solutions in the current framework. //

Would you say the existence of a common set of rules, and more specifically the establishment of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas, facilitates the development of energy grids in Europe rather than imposes additional constraints on your sector's expansion?

Yes, it provides adequate guidance for our projects. We define appropriate measures with the local stakeholders in charge of nature conservation. It also helps us to enhance public acceptance of our projects. Society sees that we are keen to protect nature wherever possible and to compensate for the effects we cannot completely avoid. The more we protect the environment when developing our grid and the more effective our compensation measures are, the greater the public understanding of our projects.

In your opinion does European nature legislation need to be modernised or changed in any way?

No, there is no need to change existing European nature legislation. We have learnt to find solutions while looking for appropriate routings and appropriate technical solutions in the current framework. There is always a solution that can be found in the current legal context. We want to prevent nature protection organisations getting the false idea that the grid development needed for a successful energy transition poses a danger to nature. This would create additional unnecessary tensions when what this project needs is broad support. The successful implementation of our grid projects requires a stable and well-balanced legal framework which safeguards economic, social and environmental standards. Constant changes in legislation would create uncertainties in the short-term and lead to additional delays to our projects. Continuity in such a legal framework is a value in itself when you consider the urgent need to develop the electricity grid. Changing nature protection laws during long-running permitting procedures would severely endanger our projects.



Tambako the Jaguar



Mark Seton



Construction and mining industry



Jim Rushworth, Vice-President Environment & Public Affairs Quarries, Aggregates & Concrete at LafargeHolcim, France

Does the existence of common nature protection rules at the European level make a positive difference to your sector?

The Birds and Habitats Directives work and can achieve their objectives if they are properly implemented. They are important and concrete instruments which the EU uses to protect biodiversity and have brought many positive effects. The cement industry, for example, uses the Directives to help evaluate the conservation activities linked to their quarry areas (restored areas, natural areas surrounding the quarries) regarding habitats, fauna and flora species. Furthermore, the onsite restoration option applied by the cement industry, in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy, has helped us to conserve and improve biodiversity. Indeed, in many instances the biodiversity found on site after restoration is of a higher value than what was originally there prior to extraction. However the issues relating to implementation, particularly the emphasis on protecting every individual of a protected species rather than ensuring that the conservation status of their populations are maintained, do result in increased costs and increased time with regard to obtaining planning permission for extensions and new sites and it is this area where we need to work closely with authorities and NGOs to improve implementation.

Would you say the existence of a common set of rules and more specifically the establishment of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas facilitates rather than hinders your sector's operations?

A common set of rules, when implemented correctly, ensures that all companies operate within a level playing field across Europe, be it between different sectors or operators based in different Member States. Regarding Natura 2000 areas, the Directives are clear in that extraction is possible in such areas under certain conditions. Indeed, the European Commission has developed Guidance in this field with the aim of clarifying this point (see 'Non-energy mineral extraction and Natura 2000'). Also, and as mentioned above, in many instances the onsite restoration actions and efforts undertaken by the cement industry have led to the establishment of additional designated Natura 2000 areas. However these guidelines have not been adopted by many Member States and this is an area where our sector must work with the Commission to raise awareness and enable access to minerals where it is appropriate.

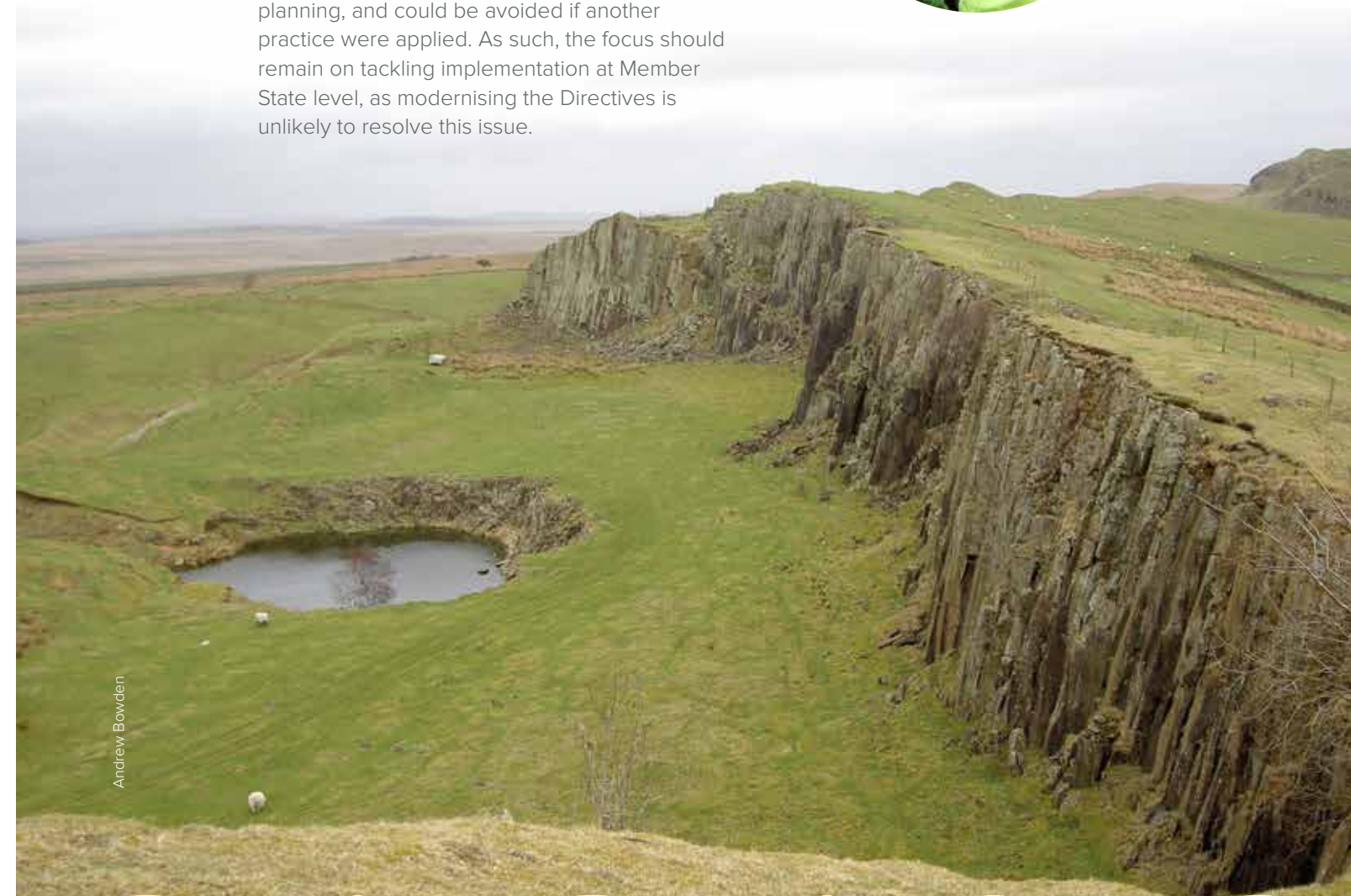


Based on our experience, there is limited evidence that the Birds and Habitats Directives themselves have caused or are causing unnecessary administrative burden.



Do you think there is a pressing need to modernise EU nature legislation?

Based on our experience, there is limited evidence that the Directives themselves have caused or are causing unnecessary administrative burden. The unnecessary administrative burden has occurred through specific implementation practices or inadequate planning, and could be avoided if another practice were applied. As such, the focus should remain on tackling implementation at Member State level, as modernising the Directives is unlikely to resolve this issue.



Port Authority



Toon Tessier, Chief Policy Advisor, Port of Antwerp, Belgium

Does the existence of common nature protection rules at the European level make a positive difference to your sector?

Yes it does make a positive difference because it reminds port authorities of the fact that everywhere in Europe, there is an urgent need to stop biodiversity loss and that everyone should act accordingly. Port authorities too must act as responsible agencies as their operating areas are mostly situated in places that are also important from a biodiversity point of view.

So in a way one could say that the common set of rules at EU level and more specifically the establishment of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas facilitates the development of your port rather than imposes additional constraints on its expansion?

Of course, depending on the geographical situation, and whether Special Conservation Areas (SCAs) or Sites of Community Importance (SCIs) overlap or are in close vicinity to the port areas, the challenges will be bigger or smaller and some ports will claim that this creates unequal conditions for port authorities to operate. Member States must help to find solutions. This is the case for the Port of Antwerp whose area overlaps with a Special Protection Area. Confronted with this problem, the Port Authority of Antwerp, together with the regional authorities, has managed to find a long term solution to deal with the requirements of the Natura 2000 network in the area.

It did take a considerable amount of effort in terms of money and time, but in the end, the nature development scheme that is now in place does not directly restrict the expansion plans. It did influence the timing of the expansion plans, as all projects are conditional on achieving the nature objectives that are legally related to the SPA in which part of the Port area is situated. More difficulties arise as well because of the fact that the nature development scheme took away vast areas of farming land, also situated in or in the vicinity of the SPA. This caused a lot of protest and even legal opposition.

It is also important to note that the Port Authority here is acting as a public agency, taking responsibility for port development and all users benefit from the efforts that the Port Authority has made and will make in the future.

Does EU Nature legislation need to be modernised or changed in any way from your point of view?

A lot of the problems are mainly related to three causes: an inadequate understanding of the Directives, an inadequate implementation by the responsible public agencies and authorities and last but not least an inadequate enforcement of the legislation. We believe that it is no coincidence that the biggest challenges arise for those species that are dependent for their survival on land used for agricultural purposes that has gradually become incompatible with the protection objectives: it is in these areas that the three causes mentioned above have caused the biggest impact.



There is an urgent need to stop biodiversity loss everywhere in Europe. Implementation of the Directives by the responsible public agencies is inadequate as is enforcement of the legislation.

As far as the ports are concerned, these have always received a lot of attention. It also took the Port Authority some time and a delay of port infrastructure projects (e.g. Deurganck Tidal Dock) before it was able to cope with all the challenges. Today, the port is better equipped. Antwerp Port Authority still hopes that in the future the Directives will be interpreted in such a way that they allow for more room for an integrated kind of planning in SPAs, in which the execution of port infrastructure projects can somehow be included. For us this is preferable over being forced to make use of the exemption procedure, laid down in article 6

of the Habitats Directive which inevitably leads to a more piecemeal and fragmented approach to problems. More specifically we believe it would be useful to have an approach in which the impact of a set of port projects on the maintenance of one SPA could be aggregated and then evaluated against what needs to be maintained in all circumstances. We are somewhat worried about recent judgments of the Court of Justice which tend to close the door on a more flexible interpretation of the Directive as we consider it essential that room for an integrated approach be preserved.



Tourism



Marta Cabral, President of Rota Vicentina, Portugal

How much does your business depend on a preserved, biodiverse natural environment?

We run a nature tourism project called Rota Vicentina and we depend totally on a protected area of high nature value. We offer 400km of marked walking and biking routes in south-west Portugal. The area we cover is almost entirely a Natura 2000 Special Area of Conservation, Costa Sudoeste. We also run programmes connecting local businesses such as rural accommodation providers. Our business was formed in 2013 and has been a huge success ever since.

Does this mean that Natura 2000 designation has had a positive effect on your business?

Yes, it makes a difference as it represents a high level of protection of the natural areas. However, I believe that Natura 2000 could have a more important and particularly a clearer roll in land-use planning and nature conservation in our region.

Is there, in your view, a need to modernise EU nature conservation legislation or make it more flexible?

It definitely should not become more flexible if that means more permissive. At the moment in our region there is strong pressure from intensive farming and forestry which is threatening our natural heritage. Indeed, these activities are a larger threat than construction or urban sprawl. In the construction sector, there are some restrictions that in practice are not a threat to nature conservation.

What makes your nearby Natura 2000 site unique and do you think the tourism potential of your local Natura 2000 site is fully exploited?

The place where I live and work can be divided into two distinct realities. The coastal area where natural values are very specific: unique landscapes, geological monuments that show millions of years of Earth's history and rich habitats. This potential is beginning to be exploited more and more and nature tourism has flourished. In this area, human activity has increased recently in the form of intensive agriculture. There is a need to reconcile agriculture and the protection of our natural heritage, and I think that at some point real compromises will have to be reached if the two are meant to co-exist.

On the other hand, there is the more inland area, which has been explored by man for many centuries. Here natural values are associated with traditional agroforestry systems like *montado* which are practices in unique habitats and landscapes. This area also has a high potential for tourism, but so far it has been poorly explored. In this area the largest threat is intensive monoculture forestry, especially in combination with the introduction of alien species such as Eucalyptus.

// Nature laws should definitely not become more flexible if that means more permissive. At the moment in our region there is strong pressure from intensive farming and forestry which is threatening our natural heritage. //



Rota Vicentina

Tourism



Stoyan Lazarov, Chairman of the Board, Bulgarian Tourist Chamber, Bulgaria

Do many hotels in your region depend heavily on nature tourism?

At the foot of Vitosha Mountain there are many small family-run hotels which are directly dependent on nature tourism, especially from winter ski tourism. A large number of chalets and other accommodation in Vitosha depend on visitors to the mountain all year round.

Is it just hotels or are there other activities which benefit as well?

Cultural tourism is directly connected to nature tourism. There are a lot of monasteries near Sofia which are located in areas with unique characteristics. Ski tourism in Vitosha Nature Park is directly connected to nature and completely depends on the possibilities of the mountain. There are small restaurants and bistros in the area around the park, companies offering horse riding, hang gliding, and many businesses related to equipment for hiking and mountain biking. Other activities that depend on nature tourism and attract visitors in Natura 2000 areas are visitor centres, museums, historical and cultural attractions.

Do you think that, on the whole, a Natura 2000 site is more likely to attract investment in its immediate surroundings or result in a reduction of opportunities for regional economic development?

Natural resources have always been a prerequisite for investment and regional economic development. Reasonable and

efficient use of natural resources which fall within the scope of a Natura 2000 site can contribute to the economic development of regions. The Natura 2000 network can be a prerequisite for generating revenue locally, by developing economic activity around recreation and tourism.

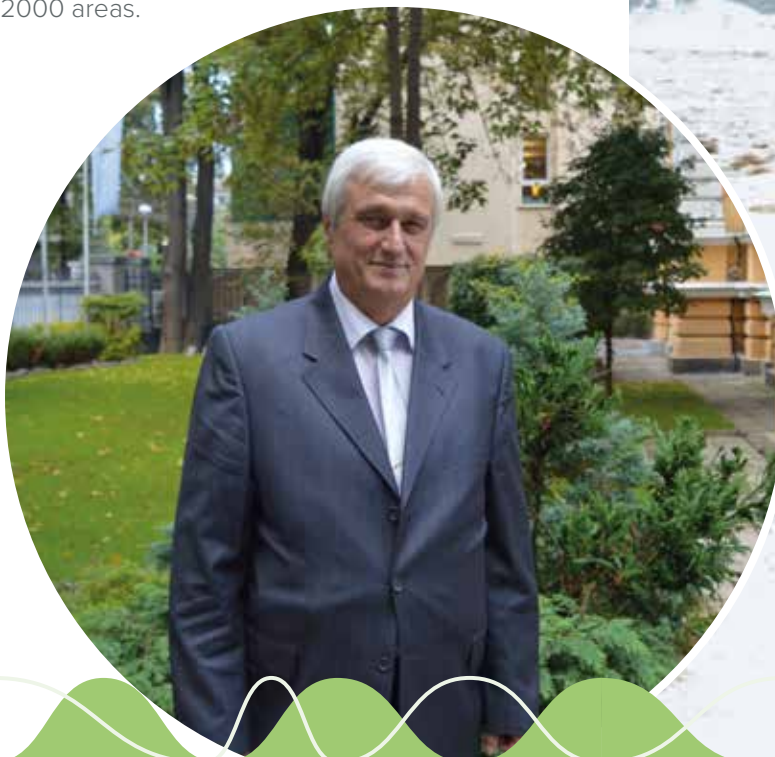
Is there, from a tourism perspective, a pressing need to modernise EU nature legislation in order to make it more flexible?

If anything there is a pressing need to modernise other EU legislation so that it better protects and preserves nature through higher requirements for assessing how compatible the construction and mining industries' activities are with the objectives of Natura 2000. This means more stringent Environmental Impact Assessments on the risks and socio-economic impact of specific activities on Natura 2000 areas.



Tamirko The Jaguar

// If anything there is a pressing need to modernise other EU legislation so that it better protects and preserves nature through higher requirements for assessing how compatible activities are with the objectives of Natura 2000. //



Emil Manolov



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