

NATURA 2000 NETWORK

A BALANCED COMBINATION
OF APPROACHES

BENEFITS FOR NATURE,
BENEFITS FOR BUSINESS

WHERE DID IT WORK?
SOME COUNTRY
EXAMPLES



MAINSTREAMING
BIODIVERSITY —





EU ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION IS LEADING TO SUCCESSFUL DIALOGUE

The Natura 2000 network is an example of a successful science-policy interface, where the network of Important Birds and Biodiversity Areas informs the designation of SPAs (Special Protection Areas).

Over the last two decades, the EU has tackled biodiversity loss through a variety of approaches. In particular, it has used its legally-binding nature legislation, with the Birds and Habitats Directives as its backbone. At the centre of the Habitats Directive lies the Natura 2000 Network, which incorporates Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the Birds Directive. All 28 EU Member States are expected to designate sites for the Natura 2000 Network within their territories, and provide effective management according to biodiversity conservation and human needs. The Network currently protects 18% of the EU land area, and is still being expanded at sea.

The principal aim of the Habitats Directive is to promote the maintenance of biodiversity, taking account of economic, social, cultural and regional requirements. The Network certainly includes nature reserves, but most of the land is likely to remain privately owned. The emphasis is on ensuring that management is sustainable, both ecologically and economically. This is a real opportunity to integrate biodiversity concerns into landscape/seascape planning.

A BALANCED COMBINATION OF APPROACHES

The process of establishing the Natura 2000 Network was initiated and led by the European Commission, with the active support of governments and NGOs. Conservation NGOs have been deeply involved in shaping the legislation, identifying sites, developing management plans and monitoring implementation. BirdLife Europe and its national Partners have played an important role in this process, from conception to implementation. A particular BirdLife contribution has been the identification of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs), used as a key scientific reference for designation of SPAs.

Under EU law, any plan or project affecting the conservation of Natura 2000 sites must be subjected to an appropriate assessment. There is a legal obligation to act on the conclusion, and plans or projects may be modified to ensure compatibility with the conservation objectives of

Natura 2000 sites. This affects virtually all sectors, but is particularly relevant for land planning, infrastructure development, agriculture and forestry.

Technical and scientific approaches to the regulatory framework are complemented by “dialogues”: implementation of the Network includes the creation of sector-specific “dialogue tables”. These are used in development of multi-stakeholder guidelines, the funding of pilot projects through the LIFE fund and intensive awareness-raising campaigns by NGOs. At national, and specifically at Natura 2000 site level, a wide range of participatory processes (established by the EU Member States) define conservation objectives, management approaches¹ and forums. These consider potential impacts of plans and projects, as well as compensatory measures.

At local and sub-national levels, an extensive communication effort with different sectors, stakeholders and territories has meant better results are achieved. Very often, positive outcomes have relied on an active local “champion” for the protected site.

BENEFITS FOR NATURE, BENEFITS FOR BUSINESS

Investors have argued that Natura 2000 imposes administrative burdens on business, increases costs, and prevents economic development. The legislation is not intended to prevent investment, but to ensure development overall is sustainable and compatible with nature protection. Studies have shown² that if properly implemented, Natura 2000 can bring economic benefits (such as tourism and ecosystem services), increase human wellbeing, create green jobs, and actually help developers reduce social conflict and related costs and delays.

The legislation provides certainty, a level playing field and fair competition, in an otherwise highly fragmented continent with differing levels of environmental ambitions and conservation approaches. As the legislation has become more familiar, and the benefits clearer, many investment sectors are becoming increasingly committed to working within the framework. There is now greater understanding that it pays to work with existing legislation and in a spirit of cooperation with conservation authorities and stakeholders.



WHERE DID IT WORK? SOME COUNTRY EXAMPLES

Despite complexities around such a diverse region and stakeholders, there have been many successful experiences of Natura 2000 sites being the basis for integration of biodiversity and development goals:

1. The Renewable Grid Initiative³ has brought together electricity operators and NGOs. They are committing to, and are applying, principles which ensure that grid development needed for renewables expansion is in harmony with nature, and in line with EU nature protection legislation.
2. In Belgium, a court judgement paralysed an expansion of the Port of Antwerp⁴, leading to significant financial losses. This episode opened the door for dialogue and cooperation between environment and transportation sectors, and Natuurpunt played a major role. Today, biodiversity concerns are fully mainstreamed into all other planning of the Antwerp port. The integration model developed⁵ is being used by other European port authorities, and more widely by other authorities and sectors in Flanders.

References:

1. www.ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/guidance_en.htm
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3. www.renewables-grid.eu/
4. www.portofantwerp.com/en/planet
5. www.ec.europa.eu/ourcoast/index.cfm?menuID=8&articleID=51
www.ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm

More information:

www.ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/financing/docs/natura2000_costs_benefits.pdf
www.ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm

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