



Press Release

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Natura 2000 needs better management, financing and monitoring, say EU Auditors

Improvements are needed in the management, financing and monitoring of Natura 2000, the EU's flagship biodiversity programme, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors. While recognising that Natura 2000 plays an important role in protecting biodiversity, the auditors found shortcomings in management and a lack of reliable information on costs and financing. Funding was not sufficiently tailored to the needs of environmental sites.

The auditors visited 24 Natura 2000 sites in France, Germany, Spain, Poland and Romania, covering most of the biogeographical regions in Europe, and consulted with various stakeholder groups. They acknowledged the major role played by Natura 2000 in protecting biodiversity, but concluded that the network had not been implemented to its full potential.

"The setting-up of the Natura 2000 network was a long process, now mostly completed. To achieve adequate protection of biodiversity across the Natura 2000 sites, the Member States must still put in place proper conservation measures, appropriately funded and with a complete set of indicators measuring the results achieved," said **Nikolaos Milionis, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the report.**

The auditors found that Member States were not managing the Natura 2000 network sufficiently well. Coordination between relevant authorities, stakeholders and neighbouring Member States was not sufficiently developed. The necessary conservation measures were too often delayed or inappropriately defined. The Member States visited did not adequately assess projects impacting on Natura 2000 sites. Although the Commission was actively supervising Member States, there was scope to improve the way its guidance was communicated. The Commission dealt with a high number of complaints, generally finding solutions with the Member States or starting infringement procedures where necessary.

EU funds were not well mobilised to support the management of the network, said the auditors. The approach taken was for the Member States to use existing EU funds in addition to their own funds, and the auditors found a lack of reliable information on the costs of the network and on its financing needs. There was an incomplete picture of actual EU funding up to 2013 and of the planned allocation of funds for 2014-2020. At site level, management plans rarely gave complete

The purpose of this press release is to give the main messages of the special report adopted by the European Court of Auditors. The full report is on www.eca.europa.eu.

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cost assessments. The 2014-2020 programming documents did not fully reflect funding needs, and the Commission did not address these shortcomings in a structured manner. EU funding schemes were insufficiently tailored to the sites' objectives.

Monitoring and reporting systems were not adequate: there was no specific performance indicator system for the use of EU funds. Indicators at funding programme level related to general biodiversity objectives rather than the conservation results of the network. Site monitoring plans were often not included in management documents. Basic data on the characteristics of sites were generally not updated following monitoring activities. Data reported by the Member States was too often incomplete, and comparability remained a challenge.

The auditors make a number of recommendations to the Commission and the Member States to help achieve full implementation of the Nature Directives, clarify the financing and accounting of Natura 2000, and better measure the results it achieves.

Notes to Editors

Loss of biodiversity is one of the main environmental challenges facing the EU. The Natura 2000 network was established under the Birds and Habitats Directives as a key element of the EU's 2020 strategy to halt biodiversity loss and improve the status of habitats and species.

The Directives provide a common framework for nature protection across the Member States. The Natura 2000 network has more than 27,000 sites all over Europe, protecting diverse habitats and species covering more than 18% of the EU's land area and around 6% of the sea area. Socio-economic activities are not prohibited on the sites, but Member States must ensure there is no deterioration and take the conservation measures needed to maintain protected species and habitats at, or restore them to, favourable conservation status.

Special Report No 1/2017 "More efforts needed to implement the Natura 2000 network to its full potential" is available on eca.europa.eu in 23 EU languages.