



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 27 December 2002

COMMISSION WORKING DOCUMENT

on Natura 2000

Commission working document on

Natura 2000

1. WHAT IS NATURA 2000 AND WHY IS IT NECESSARY?

Natura 2000 is a Community-wide network of nature protection areas established under the 1992 Habitats Directive. It also includes areas designated under the 1979 Birds Directive. The aim of the network is to assure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats.

Recognition of the need for a network of this kind was a response to the large scale destruction and fragmentation of wildlife habitats, which has occurred over the decades leading up to 1992. The European Environment Agency has confirmed that many European species are declining: in recent years, 64 endemic plants of Europe have become extinct in nature; 38% of bird species and 45% of butterflies are threatened, with vulnerable or endangered populations; and, Europe has witnessed the first case of extinction (a type of mountain goat) of a species already listed in the Habitats Directive. Pressures on habitats and ecosystems are also intense: for example, wetlands in north and west Europe have been reduced by some 60% in recent decades. The pressures responsible for this loss, i.e. urban, infrastructure and tourism development, agricultural and forestry intensification, etc. have continued over the last decade.

Natura 2000 therefore plays the key role in protecting the EU's bio-diversity in line with the decision taken at the meeting of the European Council in Göteborg in June 2001 to halt bio-diversity decline within the Union by 2010.

The Habitats Directive identifies some 200 habitat types and 700 species of plants and animals of Community importance. The long-term conservation of these species cannot be achieved by protecting isolated pockets of nature however great their individual value. By establishing a network of sites across the full distribution of these habitats and species Natura 2000 is intended to be a dynamic and living network providing a guarantee for their conservation. Other provisions relating to species protection under the nature directives also complement these site conservation measures.

2. HOW DOES NATURA 2000 WORK?

The Habitats Directive outlines three stages in the establishment of Natura 2000:

- Proposals for sites for inclusion in the Natura 2000 network;
- Selection of a list of sites of Community importance from proposals made by Member States; and,
- Establishment of management regimes for the sites.

2.1. Proposing Sites for Natura 2000 - A Member State Responsibility

The responsibility for proposing sites for Natura 2000 lies with the Member States. Although they were required by the directive to make their proposals by 1996, there have been

considerable delays. These delays have led the Commission to initiate a number of actions before the Court and also to link approval of certain Structural Fund programmes to the submission of site lists. These actions have resulted in significant progress and for most Member States substantial proposals have now been received.

2.2. Adopting Lists of Sites of Community Importance - Science and Stakeholders

The role of the Commission is to adopt lists of sites of Community importance on the basis of Member States' proposals. The analysis of the Member State proposals is carried out in a transparent way by scientific seminars convened by the Commission and supported by the European Environment Agency. Member States and experts representing relevant stakeholder interests from owners and users as well as environmental NGO's participate in these seminars.

Given the large natural variation in bio-diversity across the EU, the directive divides the Community into six bio-geographical regions - Atlantic, Continental, Alpine, Mediterranean, Boreal and Macaronesian. The objective is to establish a list of sites of Community importance for each of these coherent bio-diversity regions. The Commission adopted a definitive list of sites for the first bio-geographical region - *Macaronesia* - in December 2001. The list identifies sites covering 30% of these islands, which possess some of the richest and most varied wildlife in Europe. This is a major step forward and signifies the strong commitment of the Spanish and Portuguese governments to the implementation of the network. Good progress is being made with the remaining regions with the adoption of the remaining lists foreseen over the next 18 months.

2.3. Management of Designated Sites - Responsibility of Member States

The provisions of the directive clearly make the Member States responsible for the designation of Natura 2000 sites and for their management. Often the detailed work involved is further delegated to various national agencies or, in the case of federal Member States, to the regions. In the case of the marine environment, where management activities may involve regulating fisheries activities, this would benefit from action at Community level.

The Commission has consistently promoted the development of management plans as the instrument for both ensuring the appropriate conservation management of the sites as well as the framework for judging the compatibility of different uses with conservation objectives. They also represent an excellent way to actively involve key interest groups affected by the designation in management decisions. Funding from the Life-Nature programme has been extensively used to assist in the preparation of such plans.

Given the extensive range of habitats types and situations, it is obvious that there is no standard formula, which can be applied. However, as a general rule it will be important to ensure continuation of traditional management regimes, which very often have been critical in creating and maintaining the habitats which are valued today.

3. NATURA 2000 AND DEVELOPMENT - CONSERVATION BUT FLEXIBILITY

Beyond the establishment of the required management regimes the directive also provides for the assessment of development proposals which are likely to have impacts on designated sites. These provisions are based on existing practice with respect to environmental impact assessment. Even where such assessments show that significant damage to a site will occur, the directive does not preclude development. Member States may authorise developments in cases where no viable alternatives are available and where an overriding public interest in the

development is demonstrated. In these cases they are, however, obliged to implement compensation measures by creation or improvement of habitat elsewhere to maintain the integrity of the network.

In the case of developments which will have an adverse impact on sites which host priority habitats or species (particularly rare and vulnerable habitats and species which are a small part of the overall list) the directive requires the Commission to give an opinion on whether an overriding public interest is involved. A current example of such a request concerns proposals for the expansion of the Port of Rotterdam which will have a significant impact on a Natura 2000 site. This has been a very well planned proposal and includes a significant package of measures to compensate for the loss of habitats foreseen.

4. THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

4.1. Positive Results

While the establishment of the network is not yet complete, considerable progress has been achieved. There are many positive examples where the initial concerns of local people and particularly owners and users have been resolved by the production of management plans based on extensive dialogue at the local level. This has been supported by the Life-Nature programme which has funded 605 projects to a value of €470m since its inception in 1992. Examples include the preparation of management plans for marine sites in the U.K. and the preparation of '*documents d'objectives*' for sites in France. The first of these documents are now starting to be agreed with the collaboration of local '*comités de pilotages*' which ensure a broad participation of all interest groups. The LIFE-Nature project in the 'landes de Corèze' has been particularly successful, including the collaboration of the local '*chambre d'agriculture*'. A number of the projects have been based on the re-establishment of traditional agricultural practices critical for nature conservation and have led to the development of agri-environment schemes to support them.

4.2. On-going Problems - Consultation on Selection of Sites

The directive did not lay down in detail the consultation process to be followed for the selection of sites. As a result, the procedures have varied considerably between Member States in accordance with their administrative systems. In some cases, identification of the sites has been accompanied by detailed discussion with owners and users on management measures but in other cases there has been little or no consultation with stakeholders. This has given rise to considerable controversy in some Member States with a variety of administrative and legal challenges, which have delayed the submission of proposals. The Commission is not involved at this stage and has no powers to intervene in the differing procedures followed in Member States.

4.3. Complaints and Infringements

Delays in implementation of the directive in several Member States have given rise to many complaints to the Commission on matters relating to both the designation of sites and their protection. While this can be seen as an indicator of public support for this policy, it also creates problems. Even though over 80% of complaints are closed after first informal contacts with Member States, the Commission is inevitably drawn into dealing with issues which are the responsibility of the Member States under the directive.

In order to help overcome these problems of implementation, the Commission is developing guidelines. Guidance has already been published on management and planning issues and working groups with the Member States are developing further topics - conservation objectives, reporting and monitoring and hunting management.

Regular contact and dialogue with the Member States is ensured both through the Habitats Committee and the more recently established biannual meeting with Nature directors. This provides an invaluable forum for early discussion of emerging issues.

Stronger and more effective mechanisms for handling complaints within Member States could also reduce the volume of cases being handled directly by the European Commission.

5. COMMUNITY CO-FINANCING

The directive foresees that the Community should co-finance certain costs related to the management of sites in the network and that such financing would come from existing financial instruments. There is, however, no clear framework established to manage the programming of such financing and the processes foreseen in subsequent decisions for various instruments do not easily permit such a framework to be developed.

Current policy measures, in particular the agri-environment regime under Rural Development Policy, are already providing substantial support to the implementation of the network by way of payments to farmers for ecologically friendly agricultural management of their land. In some Member States, there has also been significant use of European Regional Development Fund resources to finance specific investments related to Natura 2000 sites. These are most commonly related to facilities and infrastructures for visitor use. At present, the only funding dedicated exclusively to Natura 2000 is the Life-Nature funds, which are used to promote management planning and pilot/demonstration projects of habitat and species management.

A working party of national experts and stakeholder representatives has been charged with reviewing the likely costs of managing Natura 2000 and making recommendations to the Commission. This group, which is working in association with the DGs for the environment, agriculture, regional affairs and budget, will make its recommendations later this year. The Commission will be invited to adopt a Communication on co-financing Natura 2000 during the course of 2003

6. NEXT STEPS

The next steps in developing Natura 2000 will include:

- Finalising the Community Lists - the final round of scientific seminars is programmed for completion by March/April 2003, which should permit the adoption of the outstanding lists in the first half of 2004;
- Further application of NATURA 2000 in the offshore marine environment. At the request of the Nature Directors of Member States an expert working group is being established to assist with this;

* These documents are available on the website of Nature and Biodiversity unit of Directorate General Environment at the following address '<http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/home.htm>'

- Clarifying the framework for Community funding;
- Further development of interpretation and guidance to Member States; and,
- Improving communication/explaining better the objectives of the directive. In co-operation with the Nature directors of Member States, DG Environment has already created a communications working group which will produce an overall communications strategy to be implemented in collaboration between the Commission and the Member States. The Commission has already taken a number of steps including publication of information pamphlets and the Natura 2000 newsletter with a distribution list of 15,000 contacts in national and local authorities and interest groups; participation in conferences and workshops with regional authorities and interest groups; and the Green Days initiative, a programme of 500 events throughout the Community and accession countries aimed at explaining the directive to a wide audience.

Additional species and habitat types have been agreed with the Member States and Candidate Countries to be added to the directive in order to take account of the increased range of biodiversity which will be introduced to the Union through enlargement. This will be introduced by a technical Annex to the Act of Accession for each country. The Candidate Countries are making good progress in implementing Natura 2000 and will be required to propose sites for Nature 2000 designation at the time of their accession.

At present, additions to the list of protected species and habitat types in the directive, or conversely deletions from the list when the conservation status of a species or habitat improves, are undertaken through a legislative process of co-decision. Consideration is being given to how such updating of the list should be handled in future.

There is a need and scope for reinforcing the different activities that support the full implementation of Natura 2000, particularly making the link with other Community policies - regional, agricultural, fisheries, etc. In the context of the governance exercise a working group is developing ideas on 'tripartite' contracts with regions and Natura 2000 is a good candidate for reinforced collaboration with regions on the implementation and communication of Community policy.

ANNEX

Questions & Answers

on

Natura 2000

What is happening to Europe's biodiversity ?

During recent decades, the reduction and loss of biodiversity in Europe has accelerated dramatically. These trends include reduction and loss in terms of species as well as habitats and ecosystems. The overall loss and degradation of habitats has been intense. For example, wetlands in north and west Europe have been reduced by some 60% in recent decades. The European Environment Agency confirms that many European species are declining: 64 endemic plants of Europe have already become extinct in nature, 45% of butterflies and 38% of birds species are considered as threatened. Europe has already witnessed the extinction of the first species, which it committed itself to protect in the Habitats Directive, the Pyrenean Mountain Goat. The Iberian Lynx is now considered to be the most threatened cat species in the wild. It has been subject of a spectacular decline over the past ten years caused by the destruction of habitats and impacts on its prey species.

The pressures responsible for this loss, i.e. urban, infrastructure and tourism development, agricultural and forestry intensification, etc. have continued over the last decade and there is a need for action at Community as well as at national level in order to protect Europe's biodiversity...Natura 2000 is part of the EU's response to this challenge.

What exactly is Natura 2000 ?

Natura 2000 is the EU-wide network of nature protection areas established under the 1992 Habitats Directive, which aims to safeguard Europe's most important wildlife areas. It is comprised of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated by Member States under the Habitats Directive, and also incorporates Special Protection Areas (SPAs) which they designate under the 1979 Birds Directive. The establishment of this network of protected areas where special measures are taken to conserve biological diversity also fulfils a clear Community obligation under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

The Habitats Directive identifies some 200 habitat types and 700 species of plants and animals of EU importance. The Birds Directive lists 181 vulnerable species for which habitat protection through site protection is required. It also recognises the need to protect areas of importance for migratory bird species, especially wetland habitats.

The long-term conservation of these habitats and species cannot be achieved by protecting isolated pockets of nature however great their individual value. By establishing a network of sites across the full distribution of these habitats and species Natura 2000 is intended to be a dynamic and living network providing a guarantee for their conservation.

Natura 2000 is not a system of strict nature reserves where all human activities are excluded. Whereas the network will certainly include nature reserves most of the land is likely to

continue to be privately owned and the emphasis will be on ensuring that future management is sustainable, ecologically, economically and socially.

What is the role of Natura 2000 in EU biodiversity policy?

It was in recognition of the importance of safeguarding biodiversity that the European Council in Göteborg in June 2002, set the objective of halting bio-diversity decline within the Union by 2010. The achievement of this objective is identified as one of the priority themes under the EU's 6th Environmental Action Programme.

EU biodiversity policy has two main complementary approaches. Firstly, it aims to integrate biodiversity considerations into all the relevant policy sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, and transport as well as into policy instruments such as environmental liability, ecolabelling etc; This is an important focus of the EU's Biodiversity Strategy and its sectoral integration plans, which have recently been approved.

Secondly, targeted measures are needed to ensure the survival of many species and habitats that are already under threat. This is the role played by Natura 2000, which aims to assure the long-term survival of Europe's most vulnerable species and habitats, by ensuring that a sufficient number and area of their most important sites are adequately protected and positively managed. These site conservation measures are complemented by other species protection provisions of the nature directives.

How are Natura 2000 sites selected ?

Natura 2000 is comprised of sites designated by Member States under both the Birds and Habitats Directives, which are subject to different selection processes.

- **Selection of Special Protection Areas under Birds Directive**

Member States select and designate Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the Birds Directive. The identification and delimitation of SPAs must be entirely based on scientific criteria such as '1% of the population of listed vulnerable species' or 'wetlands of international importance for migratory waterfowl. Whereas Member States have a margin of discretion in determining the most appropriate criteria they must then fully apply them in a way that ensures that all the 'most suitable territories', both in number and surface area, are designated. On the basis of information provided by the Member States the Commission determines if the designated sites are sufficient to form a coherent network for the protection of the vulnerable and migratory species.

- **Selection of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under Habitats Directive**

There are three stages in the selection of Special Areas of Conservation under the Habitats Directive:

1. The responsibility for proposing sites for Natura 2000 lies with the Member States who make comprehensive assessments of each of the habitat types and species present on their territory. Often the detailed work involved is further delegated to various national agencies or, in the case of federal Member States, to the regions. Their choice of sites is an exclusively scientific exercise undertaken using standard selection criteria specified in Annex III of the directive. This requires the authorities to carry out an assessment of the *representativity* and *ecological quality* of each

habitat type as well as the *area* of the site covered by the habitat type for every site. Likewise, there must be an assessment of the *size and density* as well *degree of isolation* of each species site relative to its natural range together with a determination of the *quality of the site* for the species concerned. On the basis of these criteria Member States make an overall *global assessment* of the importance of their sites for each species and habitat types. This ecological information forms the basis for further assessments at EU level.

2. On the basis of the proposed national lists the Commission, in agreement with the Member States, adopts lists of sites of Community importance. The analysis of the Member State proposals is carried out in a transparent way by scientific seminars convened by the Commission and supported by the European Environment Agency. These expert seminars aim to establish if sufficient high-quality sites have been proposed by each Member States to ensure the favourable conservation status of each habitat type and species throughout their range in the EU. The criteria for assessment include consideration of the rarity, geographic distribution and overall vulnerability of the species and habitat types concerned. Member States and experts representing relevant stakeholder interests including owners and users and environmental NGO's participate in these seminars. Given the large natural variation in bio-diversity across the EU, the directive divides the Community into six bio-geographical regions - Atlantic, Continental, Alpine, Mediterranean, Boreal and Macaronesian. The objective is to establish a list of sites of Community importance for each of these coherent biodiversity regions, applying a consistent approach across the Member States.
3. Once the lists of Sites of Community Importance have been adopted it is then for the Member States to designate all sites as SACs as soon as possible and within six years at most. They should give priority to those sites that are under most threat and/or that are of most importance in conservation terms. During this period Member States should establish the necessary management or restoration measures for the sites to ensure their favourable conservation status.

Is there public consultation on the selection of Sites ?

The directive does not lay down rules regarding the consultation process to be followed in selecting the sites, which is for the Member States to determine in accordance with their administrative systems. The procedures for public consultation have varied considerably between Member States. In some countries, identification of the sites has been accompanied by detailed discussion with owners and users on management measures but in other cases there has been little or no consultation with stakeholders. This has given rise to considerable controversy in some Member States with a variety of administrative and legal challenges, which have delayed the submission of proposals. The Commission is not involved at this stage and has no powers to intervene in the differing procedures followed in Member States.

Who is responsible for management of Natura 2000 sites and how is this achieved?

The provisions of the directive clearly make the Member States responsible for the management of Natura 2000 sites. In the case of the marine environment, where management activities may involve regulating fisheries activities, this would benefit from action at Community level.

The Commission has consistently promoted the development of management plans as the instrument for both ensuring the appropriate conservation management of the sites as well as the framework for judging the compatibility of different uses with conservation objectives. They also represent an excellent way to actively involve key interest groups, affected by the designation, in management decisions. Funding from the Life-Nature programme has been extensively used to assist in the preparation of such plans.

Given the extensive range of habitats types and situations, no standard formula can be applied. However, as a general rule it will be important to ensure continuation of traditional management regimes, which very often have been crucial in creating and maintaining the habitats, which are valued today.

There are many positive examples where the initial concerns of local people and owners and users have been resolved by the production of management plans based on extensive dialogue at local level. This has been supported by the Life-Nature programme, which has funded 605 projects to a value of €470m since its inception in 1992. Examples include the preparation of management plans for marine sites in the U.K. and the preparation of '*documents d'objectives*' for sites in France. The first of these documents are now starting to be agreed with the collaboration of local '*comités de pilotages*' which ensure a broad participation of all interest groups. The LIFE-Nature project in the 'landes de Corèze' has been particularly successful, including the collaboration of the local 'chambre d'agriculture'. A number of the projects have been based on the re-establishment of traditional agricultural practices critical for nature conservation and have led to the development of agri-environment schemes to support them.

Once a site is included in Natura 2000 will it become untouchable as regards future developments ?

There is not any *a priori* prohibition of new activities or developments within Natura 2000 sites. This needs to be judged on a case by case basis. Article 6 of the Habitats Directive, which applies to all Natura 2000 sites, provides for the assessment of development proposals which are likely to have an impact on designated sites. These provisions are based on existing good practice with respect to environmental impact assessment. Even where such assessments show that significant damage to a site will occur, the directive does not preclude development. Member States may authorise developments in cases where no viable alternatives are available and where an overriding public interest in the development is demonstrated. In these cases they are, however, obliged to implement compensation measures by creation or improvement of habitat elsewhere to maintain the integrity of the network.

In the case of developments which will have an adverse impact on sites that host priority habitats or species (particularly rare and vulnerable habitats and species that form a small part of the overall number listed in the Habitats Directive) the only considerations that may be raised are those related to human health, public safety or to beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment. For any other considerations the directive requires the Commission to give an opinion on whether an overriding public interest is involved. A current example of such a request concerns proposals for the expansion of the Port of Rotterdam, which will have a significant impact on a Natura 2000 site. This has been a very well planned proposal and includes a significant package of measures to compensate for the loss of habitats foreseen.

To assist Member States and other interested actors in implementing the provisions of Article 6 detailed interpretative and methodological guidance have been published.

What is the current state of play regarding establishing of Natura 2000 ?

While the establishment of the network is not yet complete, very considerable progress has been achieved. This has been evidenced by recent advances in establishing a coherent network of SPAs under the Birds Directive, with an area equivalent to 8 % of the territory of the Member States now designated. However, substantial gaps still exist for certain species and regions of the EU for which further sites need to be designated. Likewise, under the Habitats Directive an area equivalent to 14 % of Member States territory has been proposed for protection. This includes an inshore marine component of Natura 2000, which is already very substantial for several Member States such as Denmark and the Netherlands. The outstanding insufficiencies currently being addressed are not likely to involve a significant overall extension to these figures.

Two factors have contributed to the progress which has recently been achieved. The first of these has been the fact that the Commission has not hesitated to initiate legal action in the European Court. The second being the indicator given by the Commission that failure to present lists of sites could result in the suspension of payments under certain structural fund programmes. The suspension of payments from such programmes being seen as a precautionary measure to ensure that Community funded programmes do not contribute to irreparable damage to sites before they have been proposed officially for the protection under the Natura 2000 regime.

The Commission adopted a definitive list of sites for the first bio-geographical region - *Macaronesia* - in December 2001. The list identifies sites covering 30% of these islands, which possess some of the richest and most varied wildlife in Europe. This is a major step forward and signifies the strong commitment of the Spanish and Portuguese governments to the implementation of the network. Good progress is being made with the remaining regions with the adoption of the remaining lists foreseen over the next 18 months.

However, for marine areas, particularly in the offshore environment, it is recognised that further work is required under both nature directives to identify and manage a network of sites. This forms part of the wider marine strategy recently proposed by the Commission.

Why does the Commission receive a large number of complaints relating to Natura 2000 ?

Delays in fully establishing the Natura 2000 network as well as in putting in place and applying the associated safeguards have created conditions which generate citizen complaints, petitions and written questions from the European Parliament.

What is the overall pattern of infringements to date on Natura 2000 ?

The Commission receives several hundred complaints each year relating to the nature directives. Over 80% of these complaints are closed after first informal contacts with the Member States and only a small percentage become infringement proceedings. The vast majority of cases are resolved through the normal procedure and do not come before the Court of Justice. In 2001 DG ENV received 345 complaints relating to these directives, of which 131 have already been closed and only 9 transformed into infringement cases.

The nature of the infringements vary. They include cases relating to deficiencies in national transposing legislation, incomplete designations, lack of implementation reports. They also involve cases concerning the unsatisfactory application of the protection regime of the

Habitats and Birds Directives in relation to planned development. Amongst other reasons it is necessary to address such unsatisfactory application of the directives in order to ensure that any envisaged use of Community funds for development does not conflict with Community law.

How can the Commission help Member States better implement Natura 2000 ?

In order to help overcome these problems of implementation, the Commission is developing guidelines. Guidance has already been published on management and planning issues and working groups with the Member States are developing further topics - conservation objectives, reporting and monitoring and hunting management. Regular contact and dialogue with the Member States is ensured both through the Habitats and Ornis (Birds Directive) Committees and the more recently established biannual meeting with Nature Directors. This provides an invaluable forum for early discussion of emerging issues.

In those Member States which have made good progress with designations and which also have more open and participatory planning processes (e.g. Denmark, Netherlands and United Kingdom) the Commission generally receives fewer complaints. Therefore, stronger and more effective mechanisms for handling complaints within Member States could also reduce the volume of cases being handled directly by the European Commission.

Has the Community a role in co-financing Natura 2000 and why is this important?

Many of the difficulties that have arisen with regard to establishing Natura 2000 relate to questions about the implications for management of the designated sites, especially as to who bears the costs of the necessary conservation measures. Article 8 of the Habitats Directive foresees Community co-financing of measures required for the implementation and ongoing management of Natura 2000 through the use of existing Community instruments.

Current policy measures, in particular those under Rural Development Policy such as the agri-environment regime, are already providing substantial support to the implementation of the network by way of payments to farmers for ecologically friendly agricultural management of their land. In some Member States, there has also been significant use of European Regional Development Fund resources to finance specific investments related to Natura 2000 sites. These are most commonly related to facilities and infrastructures for visitor use. At present, the only funding dedicated exclusively to Natura 2000 is the Life-Nature funds, which are used to promote management planning and pilot/demonstration projects of habitat and species management.

There is, however, no clear framework established to manage the programming of financing for Natura 2000 and the processes foreseen in subsequent decisions for various instruments do not easily permit such a framework to be developed.

How is the Commission dealing with the issue of future co-financing ?

A working party of national experts and stakeholder representatives is reviewing the likely costs of managing Natura 2000 and will make recommendations to the Commission. This group, which is working in association with the DGs for the environment, agriculture, regional affairs and budget, will deliver its recommendations before the end of 2002. The report will cover:

- An estimation of the likely costs involved in management of the Natura 2000 network

- A review of the adequacy of existing Community instruments to contribute to co-financing
- Recommendations and examination of options for a future funding framework for Natura 2000, including consideration of which kinds of costs should be eligible for Community support.

Drawing on the findings of the expert group it is intended to present a Communication to the Council and the Parliament in 2003.

What are the priorities for future action ?

The next steps in developing Natura 2000 will include:

- Finalising the Community Lists - the final round of scientific seminars is programmed for completion by March/April 2003, which should permit the adoption of the outstanding lists in the first half of 2004;
- Further application of NATURA 2000 in the offshore marine environment. At the request of the Nature Directors of Member States an expert working group is being established to assist with this;
- Clarifying the framework for Community funding;
- Further development of interpretation and guidance to Member States; and,
- Improving communication/explaining better the objectives of the directive.

In co-operation with the Nature Directors from the Member States, DG Environment has already created a communications working group, which will produce an overall communications strategy to be implemented by the Commission and the Member States. The Commission has already taken a number of steps including publication of information pamphlets and the Natura 2000 newsletter with a distribution list of 15,000 contacts in national and local authorities and interest groups. It also participates in conferences and workshops with regional authorities and interest groups. It has launched the Green Days initiative, a programme of 500 events throughout the Community and accession countries aimed at explaining the directive to a wide audience.

As regards preparations for enlargement additional species and habitat types have been agreed with the Member States and Candidate Countries to be added to the directive in order to take account of the increased range of bio-diversity which will result from enlargement. This will be introduced by a technical Annex to the Act of Accession for each country. The Candidate Countries are making progress in implementing Natura 2000 and will be required to propose sites for Nature 2000 designation at the time of their accession.

At present, additions to the list of protected species and habitat types in the directive, or conversely deletions from the list when the conservation status of a species or habitat improves, are undertaken through a legislative process of co-decision. Consideration is being given to how updating of the list should be handled in future.

There is a large degree of agreement with Member States about the strategic importance of Natura 2000 and the agenda of priority actions to fully realise the potential of the network. The 'El Teide' Declaration, celebrating the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Habitats

Directive encompasses these points and has recently been signed by the Environment Ministers of both the Member States and the Candidate Countries.