

# The European Nature Directives

## What was expected from the ETC/BD?

The terms of reference from the EEA call for the ETC/BD to provide technical assistance to the EEA to support implementation of the EU Nature Directives by:

- Providing input, e.g. based upon data from reference databases, in workgroups and meetings
- Ensuring validation of data and input to the Commission Natura 2000 database
- Assisting in the completion of the designation process for the EU15 countries with particular attention to marine designations
- Assisting in the final process of establishing the Natura 2000 network in the accession countries including Assessment of proposals and preparation of biogeographic seminars
- Providing support in monitoring and reporting on the conservation status of habitats and species covered by the Birds and Habitats directive.

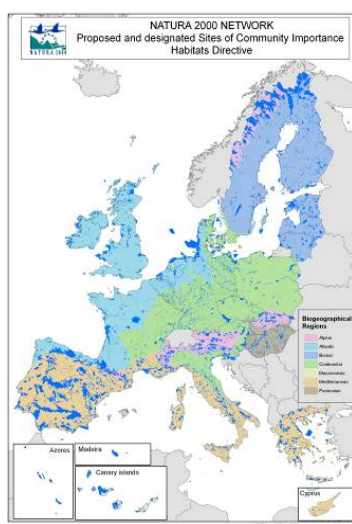
## What is the wider context of this work?

- The implementation of the Birds and the Habitats Directives implies a trans-national approach in designing an ecological network and in assessing biodiversity conservation status, based on supra-national priorities and criteria. This process, which aims at ensuring a European ecological coherence across 27 countries, is unique in the world
- It has generated a considerable amount of scientific and technical work in compiling, harmonising and assessing data on the distribution and status of more than 1500 species and habitats, based on reporting by countries and in consultation with many stakeholders
- Within this trans-national approach, provision of methodological guidelines and support to countries in their daily reporting obligations is crucial
- The information collected is an important source of data for other work such as developing biodiversity related indicators, ecological networks and integrated spatial assessments

## What has the ETC/BD achieved?

### *Support to DG Environment in the establishment of the [Natura 2000 sites](#)*

- Finalisation of the 7 Community lists<sup>5</sup> of sites under the Habitats Directive: Production, since 2004 of the Mediterranean and the Pannonic lists, and update of the 5 initial Community lists. As a whole up to 20 000 Sites of Community Importance have been adopted. This achievement is the result of a long-term process started in 1995, which, for ETC/BD, consisted in various activities:



- Assessment of national proposals:
  - Scientific evaluation of all habitats and species by using reference information from books, scientific journals, Internet...
  - Preparation of working documents: more than 1500 individual species and habitats assessments including maps
  - Management of biogeographic seminars and establishment of the conclusions of the discussions (7 since 2004)
- Establishment of community lists according to criteria defined in Annex III of the Habitats Directive
- Managing of the European Natura 2000 database including quality assurance and quality control
- Participating in regular meetings of the Habitats Committee and its Scientific Working Group and of the Member States
- Management and updating of the database on 5000 Special Protection Areas for the Birds Directive

<sup>5</sup> Alpine: 1345 sites, Atlantic : 2713 sites, Boreal : 6276 sites, Continental : 6948 sites, Macaronesia : 211 sites, Mediterranean : 2879 sites, Pannonic: 721 sites

### *Support to reporting on conservation status of given habitats and species*

The Habitats Directive requires EU member states to report on their implementation of the Directive every 6 years including the assessment of conservation status of given habitats and species at national and biogeographic level. Ultimately the reporting for Article 17 will consist of an unprecedented dataset on more than 1 500 habitats and species from across 25 countries. The ETC/BD work consists in:

- Production of a reporting format to harmonise reporting
- Supporting the EEA in developing an IT tool for transferring data from the countries
- Performing a series of rigorous quality assurance and control procedures for the descriptive and spatial data: up to six separate tests on each individual file provided by countries
- Reporting back to countries to highlight corrections needed and improve coherence and quality of the data
- Development of methodologies for producing biogeographic/ EU wide assessments of conservation status are under development.

A series of by-products have been generated as a consequence of spatial quality assurance and quality control procedures, which have a considerable value both for the Member States and for the EEA including improved GIS data sets – biogeographical boundaries, Natura 2000 site boundaries, improved country limits, vastly improved coastline data – to that which was previously available.

### **What are the main challenges ahead?**

- The Natura 2000 network is nearing completion. The information gathered across the EU 27 countries represents a unique quality checked biodiversity data set, which could be better exploited e.g. to inform policy or for research and made more widely available
- A methodology for assessing national proposals for marine Sites of Community Importance needs to be further developed
- To integrate the Birds and Habitats directive into a coherent network – Natura 2000 – requires scientific evaluation of the conservation status of bird species in a similar fashion that undertaken under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive. This requires agreement of a framework and methodologies by EU Member States
- There have been (and are likely to be further) proposals for reviewing the annexes of the Directives. The ETC/BD and EEA need to make information available so decisions can be based on evidence.

### **What have we learned from our experience?**

- The value of a full time team, associated with specific expertise from consortium partners, in close and regular contact with DG Environment, Member States and NGOs, able to be flexible in response to problems with changing deadlines
- Although most Natura 2000 sites have already been proposed and when designated will form an ecologically coherent network, the process is always changing. It needs to be able to adapt to new conditions and knowledge for example improved knowledge from new national or European inventories of habitats or species in the EU
- The quality assurance and quality control work in support to Article 17 was developed in a very short time, with limited human resources but is already showing its relevance for analysis of data delivered by Member States. This process has already generated by-products of considerable value for future EEA and ETCs work.