

EDITORIAL

Fueling the debate: ensuring biofuels are really as green as they are claimed to be

The debate around the EU biofuel strategy is keeping its place in the headlines. Politicians compete with each other in hailing biofuels as the answer to anything from Climate change and war in Middle East to falling incomes of farmers and criticism of the lack of purpose of the EU Common Agricultural Policy. While we firmly believe that renewable energy, alongside energy saving and efficiency, is a necessary tool in kicking our fossil fuel habit, we have been forcefully arguing for caution in the rush for biofuels. Without good environmental safeguards, and a policy linking incentives to greenhouse gas emission performance, public support might end up sustaining fuels that are just little better (or not at all better!) than conventional fossil fuel, as far as emissions go, while driving further agricultural intensification or habitat destruction.

The strategic debate is now reaching a first concrete milestone with the review of the Biofuel Directive. Taking a constructive step forward, BirdLife International teamed up with the EEB and the Transport and Environment Network organizing a stakeholder conference on 7 June to discuss ways to ensure that the development of a biofuel market in the EU delivers results for climate change wi-

thout undermining biodiversity and other environmental goods.

In the Conference, Commissioner Dimas gave a key-note speech, taking a strong stand on the role of biofuels and their sustainability. He argued that, in tackling climate change and security of supply, our focus must be on energy saving and efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources. Biofuels should be seen as just one small part of the solution and be approached with due care because of potential environmental impacts. He gave the Commission's full support to the principle of creating safeguard mechanisms that will ensure the sustainability of biofuels. Officials from DG TREN and AGRI also presented the EU biofuels strategy, underlining the commitment to sustainability and an open and constructive dialogue with stakeholders.

Several speakers explored the environmental risks and benefits related to biofuel production, drawing a clear picture of the present danger of a misguided drive for biofuel aggravating many of the current problems linked to agricultural expansion and intensification, both inside the EU and in Developing countries. Existing experience around environmental certification schemes has been explored, giving im-

portant insights into the way an effective safeguards system might work. Panelists representing biofuel producers, farmers, oil industry and environmental NGOs, discussed the need for environmental safeguards and what form they should take.

The strong message emerging from the Conference, and reiterated in much detail in BirdLife's response to the Commission consultation on the Biofuel Directive review, is that only a robust mandatory environmental certification scheme can steer the development of the biofuel away from unsustainable paths.

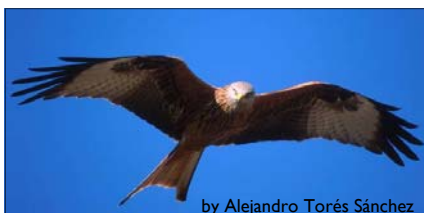
Other encouraging signs have been coming from the EU institutions. The Council conclusions on the Biofuel and biomass strategy make some strong commitments to ensuring the real sustainability of bioenergy. The Commission's good quality on-line consultation is a precious tool (though stakeholders will have to be involved on a more interactive level for an effective certification scheme to be shaped). The coming months will show whether the Commission can deliver the needed safeguards. If it doesn't, the dream of "clean energy" could still quickly turn into a nightmare of charred rainforests and silent monoculture expanses.

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Special points of interest:

- Regional Policy
- Spring hunting in Malta
- EU action plan to 2010
- Agreement on the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) Regulation



by Alejandro Torés Sánchez





EU Rural development plans: high expectations and discouraging signs

The 2007-2013 Rural Development policy is looked upon to deliver key instruments for biodiversity conservation in Europe's farmland, ranging from agri-environment schemes to supporting the management of Natura 2000 sites. A first blow to these expectations, however, has been given by the Rural Development budget that has been ruthlessly slashed. It is now clear that in most Member States there will not be enough money to meet Rural Development objectives.

However, money is not the only concern that BirdLife has over the future of Rural Development Policy in Europe. Worrying signs are emerging from the draft Rural Development plans and national strategies so far produced by EU Member States.

The lack of an effective consultation process in Member States is tangible. The "partnership principle", enshrined in the EU regulation as a key obligation for all planning authorities, has often not been taken seriously: many consultations have been partial, belated, non transparent or had their results dismissed. Many national strategies and draft national plans are of a much inferior quality than expected.

The allocation of the reduced budgets is also debatable. Despite the obvious need for an increased effectiveness and accountability of agri-environment spending, many Member States are choosing shallow schemes that are seen as easier to administer, even if their effectiveness is in doubt. The situation is worsened by the declared intention of many Mem-

ber States to shift spending from environment to competitiveness, starving already under-funded agri-environment programs. In many cases, new priorities include investment in highly damaging infrastructure developments, such as the large-scale expansion of irrigation in the Iberian Peninsula or the creation of huge, ecologically poor artificial forest plantations in the Baltic countries. These threats are real and exemplify how, despite the "green turn" rhetoric, the CAP could still land a final blow to some of the most precious and threatened wildlife habitats in Europe.

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Regional Policy

In early May we discovered that proposals to 'ear-mark' funds for actions supporting the Lisbon 'growth and jobs agenda' had been included in the General European Regional Development Fund Regulation (as Article 8.2 bis), with the list of 'priority themes' in an annex to the regulation. The negotiations had closed and there was no possibility of removing the list. BirdLife is concerned that this earmarking will make it even more difficult to finance the Natura 2000 network.

The European Regional Development Fund Regulation offers a number of opportunities for financing Natura 2000. However, the spread of activities will depend on the choices made by each Member State as well as the likely effects of earmarking. On 5th May, Environment Ministers of the 'Visegrad Group' countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) declared that the provision of adequate funding from EU sources is essential to implement the Birds and Habitats Directives. This indicates a level of concern and support among Member States for the proper financing of Natura 2000.

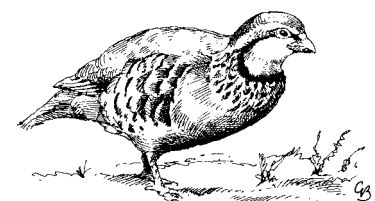
BirdLife Partners wrote to their Governments urging them to negotiate with the Commission to include specific priorities to finance Natura 2000 in their list of eligible actions for earmarked funds. This is not only essential for nature conservation, but for quality of life in the EU.

Prioritising Natura 2000 would also support the Community Strategic Guidelines to 'make Europe and its regions more attractive places to live and work' and within that the priority to 'strengthen synergies between environmental protection and growth'. Eligible actions include support for the implementation of environmental legislation such as species and nature protection (under the Convergence objective) and actions to rehabilitate the physical environment, such as investment in natural and cultural assets.

Attention is now shifting away from Brussels to the preparation of Member State's National Strategic Reference Frameworks for 2007-2013. NGOs have at their disposal the commitment in the General Regulation that "the objectives of the Funds are pursued in

European Social Fund (ESF) European Social Fund (ESF) European Social Fund (ESF) the framework of sustainable development and the Community promotion of the goal of protecting and improving the environment" and their inclusion as appropriate partners in the Partnership Article (10). We must make every effort to ensure that Natura 2000 is included in national plans and programmes.

STOP PRESS: The general regulation, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF) and cohesion fund regulations were adopted by the European Parliament on 4th July. The Structural Funds Regulations 2007-2013 are available in the European Commission website at: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/newreg10713_en.htm



Alectoris rufa by Christof Bobzin



European Commission takes legal action against spring hunting in Malta

Based on complaints and detailed studies provided by BirdLife International, BirdLife Malta and the RSPB the European Commission decided to open an infringement procedure against Malta on 28th June.

Since Malta joined the EU in 2004 it has systematically breached the Birds Directive by allowing hunting of Turtle Dove and Quail during the sensitive spring migration period, ignoring the fact that autumn hunting of these species represents an alternative solution. At the

same time the spring hunting season opens a loophole for widely practiced illegal shooting of endangered species, such as birds of prey.

BirdLife welcomes the legal steps taken now by the Commission - also because this is an important precedent for other Member States. After Malta changed its hunting law following BirdLife and EU pressure in March (see the last Brussels Briefing 14/2), we hope that Malta will now also abolish spring hunting from 2007.

Unfortunately, the first very negative reactions from the Maltese government and hunters (partly directed very aggressively against BirdLife) indicate that the case might end up at the European Court of Justice where Malta would ultimately have to face a penalty and European scale embarrassment.

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Biodiversity in the spotlight: EU action plan to 2010 and beyond

On 22nd May the European Commission published its long awaited Communication "Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 – and beyond". In a well-written and very condensed way it summarises state and trends of biodiversity at global and EU level, takes stock of EU action so far and elaborates why the decline of species, habitats and natural systems threatens human society and development and needs to be addressed with urgency.

Most importantly however, an annex to the Communication contains a detailed action plan of what measures EU Institutions and Member States should undertake by 2010 and beyond. This detailed plan is divided into ten priority objectives regarding issues such as "most important habitats and species", "wider

countryside", "marine environment", "international governance", "external assistance", "climate change", "knowledge base" etc.

The members of the European Habitats Forum (including BirdLife) have welcomed this Communication as a "strong wake-up call" to authorities, stakeholders and all European citizens. Very positive is the strong commitment to the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives, as well as the fact that the Communication stresses the need for adequate financing for biodiversity conservation.

The main concern regarding this Communication however regards its implementation. With only four years to go until 2010 the commitment and buy-in to biodiversity conservation of crucial

sectors such as agriculture and industry is still insufficient. Also, in order to achieve swift implementation and integration of the action plan in all policy fields a much stronger involvement of other ("non-environment") Commission DGs, Council formations and Parliament Committees is essential when this Communication is discussed and implemented.

Text of the Biodiversity Communication in all EU languages:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/current_biodiversity_policy/biodiversity_com_2006/index_en.htm

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Green Week 30 May to 2 June 2006: Biodiversity is life

Green Week, organised yearly near Environment Day by the European Commission in Brussels, is the biggest public event on the environment at European level. Following the publication of the EU's Communication and action plan on biodiversity (see separate article in this issue) this year's Green Week was entirely devoted to biodiversity.

The more than 20 workshops and sessions addressed issues like the global ecological footprint of the EU, the value of biodiversity, indicators and research, marine biodiversity and Natura 2000 –

all with the aim of identifying current problems and necessary future action by the EU, Member States and stakeholders. RSPB/BirdLife UK Chief Executive Graham Wynne gave a presentation about how developments like infrastructure projects and nature conservation can be reconciled. A side event organised by LPO/BirdLife France, RSPB and IUCN highlighted the importance of the EU's overseas territories and regions, and the threats to its biodiversity. Between sessions the participants of the Green Week had the chance to visit more than 80 stands of NGOs, compa-

nies, projects and institutions, including stands from BirdLife Belgium, LPO, RSPB and BirdLife International. In a joint stand OTOP/BirdLife Poland and NAJU (youth organisation of NABU/BirdLife Germany) presented the "Spring Alive" project (see <http://www.springalive.net>).

Green Week programme and further information: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/greenweek/home.html>

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LIFE+ first reading agreement

On 26 June Environment Ministers finally reached a first reading deal on the LIFE+ Regulation. Two major issues relating to the LIFE+ budget were agreed, and BirdLife believes neither was dealt with satisfactorily.

A small compensation under the EU budget deal was that €100 million was to be dedicated to LIFE+ and Natura 2000. Yet Environment Ministers only allocated €50 million to LIFE+ with the remaining €50 million being put into 'the margin' of the EU's natural resources budget.

This margin may well be a budget black hole. In principle, and with continuous vigilance, the remaining money could find its way to Natura 2000.

Yet LIFE+ will have a strategically planned multiannual programme. It will therefore be problematic to allocate effectively small amounts of money from the margin into the LIFE+ programme over seven years.

It will be up to the European Parliament to ensure that the full €100 million goes to LIFE+ at second reading.

The second budget issue was that 40% of LIFE+ shall be dedicated to nature and biodiversity. This is simply not enough. BirdLife estimates that the funding gap for the EU's Natura 2000 network is €500 million per year. This allocation would cover less than a quarter of that financial need.

We believe that at least 50% of the

LIFE+ budget should be dedicated to nature and biodiversity, and possibly more.

BirdLife hopes for a quick resolution to these problems at second reading in the Parliament to allow LIFE+ money to start to flow to where it is needed in 2007. We hope that the LIFE+ multiannual programme supports the stated objectives of the Regulation and does not try to limit what has been negotiated over the past two years.

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First salon in Brussels

BirdLife International and its German Partner NABU have organized a first "NABU salon" in Brussels. The event took place on 28th March 2006 in the venue of the Lower Saxony Permanent Representation in Brussels and hosted almost 80 prominent guests represen-

ting the European Parliament, the Commission, NGOs, industry and media.

The event followed a European tradition of the 1920s: creating a friendly environment where thinkers and visionaries could freely discuss and develop

new ideas on contemporary issues. NABU has successfully revived this tradition in Berlin over the last years and now exported it to the "capital of Europe".

The participants of the Brussels salon enjoyed an interesting programme under the slogan 'Climate change for Biodiversity' and tasted delicious organic food and drinks, all in a typical salon atmosphere with soothing live jazz music.

The event included a short panel debate with guest speakers Matthias Oel from the Cabinet of Commissioner Günter Verheugen, Rebecca Harms MEP, Jörg-Andreas Krüger (NABU) and Claire Papazoglou.

The lively discussions on the impacts of climate change on biodiversity, but also about the EU's biodiversity policy in the context of Lisbon agenda and economic development stimulated debate - and questions. Let's hope to find more answers during the next NABU salon in Brussels in March 2007 (under the German EU Presidency)!



From left to right: Matthias Oel (Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Verheugen), Rebecca Harms (MEP), Kathrin Succow-Hoffmann (German Federal Association of Foundations), Jörg-Andreas Krüger (NABU, Head of the Department for Nature Conservation and Environmental Policy), Claire Papazoglou (BirdLife International, Head of European Division), Konstantin Kreiser (BirdLife International, EU Policy Manager).



The European Fisheries Fund finally adopted

After a long running saga including two unsuccessful attempts at adoption, the Council of Agriculture and Fisheries Ministers on 19 June finally reached an agreement on the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) Regulation. The EFF, with a budget of around EUR 3.8 billion, will replace the current Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG) and will run for the next seven years (2007-2013).

The fund designed to address five priority axes, will continue funding many measures currently financed by the FIFG, but will also fund a range of innovative measures, which should contribute to the sustainability of European fishing and aquaculture. These include measures to support the implementation of stock recovery plans, support

for more selective fishing methods, as well as funding for local strategies for sustainable development. The fund also provides enhanced funding for inland fishing and environmentally-friendly aquaculture.

Although the Regulation makes positive steps forward, the final Council compromise introduces the possibility of using the fund for the modernisation of vessel engines.

This is a move that BirdLife International and other environmental NGOs strongly opposed on the grounds that it could lead to increasing fishing capacity and hence further pressure on the marine environment. Moreover, support for modernisation will take funds away from more sustainable activities and projects.

Although the text of the EFF Regulation has been finalised, the question of whether “sustainability is at the heart of the new European fisheries fund” as the Commission proclaims is still to be answered. Only when the national operational programmes prepared by the Member States are available, it will become clear to what extent the EU public funds for fisheries contribute to sustainability and to what extent they will be used to cause further imbalances between fish stocks and fleet capacity.

BirdLife International Partners should seek to help their governments to take the right decisions – in favour of sustainable fisheries and the protection of the marine environment.

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The Future Maritime Policy needs a strong Environmental Framework

The European Commission in its Strategic Objectives for 2005-2009 identified the need for an “all-embracing maritime policy aimed at developing a thriving maritime economy and the full potential of sea-based activity in an environmentally sustainable manner”. This « President Barroso » initiative materialized on 7 June 2006 when the Commission published a Green Paper entitled “Towards a future maritime Policy for the union: A European vision for the

oceans and seas”.

With the publication of the paper, a one year consultation was launched, which is to end on 30 June 2007.

The Green Paper sets out issues for discussion in various areas, trying to look at the opportunities, threats and challenges the ocean and seas provide in a holistic way. The main objective is to stimulate growth and jobs in accordance with the Lisbon agenda. The paper also stresses a need for the protec-

tion of marine resources and sustainability as a guiding principle for all the activities.

The Thematic Strategy for Marine Environment, in particular the proposed Marine Strategy Directive currently being discussed in the Council and the Parliament, is supposed to be “the environmental pillar” of the future Maritime Policy.

BirdLife International recognizes the need for coordinated and integrated approach to marine related activities. However, bearing in mind the alarming status of the marine environment and its resources, BirdLife is skeptical about the future Maritime policy, unless the Marine Strategy Directive is significantly strengthened so it provides a sound framework for the regulation of all uses of the oceans. BirdLife International is hoping that the European Institutions will embrace their current opportunity and responsibility, and agree on a Directive which provides a strong, holistic and integrated approach to marine protection, and forms a robust foundation for the future Maritime policy.



By Stefan Benko



European Parliamentary Questions & Answers

The Questions & Answers are set out as follows:

Subject, Question nr., Name & Party asking, date of question, Summary of Question, Commissioner answering, date of answer, Summary of answer.

Please contact us for more information on any of these questions & answers.

Biofuels - E-1492/06 - 7/04/06 by Mary McDonald (GUE/NGL)

The Agriculture Commissioner recently urged Member States to increase their use of biofuels and pointed out that the EU was not on target to meet its target of 5.75 % biofuel content in fuels by 2010.

Can the Commission confirm that the Irish Government has not met its targets for biofuel content in fuels?

What practical incentives and encouragement can the Commission offer farmers to increase production of biofuels?

Answer by Ms Fischer-Boel 16/05/06

The Biofuels Directive establishes the reference values of a 2 % market share for biofuels at the end of 2005 and a 5.75 % share at the end of 2010. In 2004, Member States were required to set national indicative targets for 2005. If these targets differed from the 2 % reference value, they were required to motivate the difference.

Ireland set a target of a biofuel share of 0.06 % for 2005. In July 2005, the Commission initiated infringement proceedings on the grounds that Ireland had not adequately motivated its decision to deviate from the 2 % reference value.

Subsequently, Ireland informed the Commission that it has set further targets of 1.14 % for 2006, 1.75 % for 2007 and 2.24 % for 2008. Taking this information into account, the Commission closed its case against Ireland in April 2006.

Concerning national indicative targets for 2010, the Directive

requires Member States to report these by 1 July 2007.

In accordance with the directive, the Commission intends to submit a progress report to the Council and the Parliament by the end of 2006. This report will assess whether the EU as a whole is on course to achieve the 5.75 % reference value and whether the Directive needs to be amended. The Commission will seek interested parties' views on these questions through a consultation exercise which will end in early July 2006.

For many years, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has offered special measures to encourage biofuel production in the EU, either via direct subsidies or indirect forms of incentive. The ongoing process of the CAP reform started in 1992 has reduced price support and helped to increase the competitiveness of EU agricultural production for all possible outlets: food, animal feed and non-food use including biofuels. This is particularly important for cereals, which are currently one of the major feedstocks for EU bioethanol production.

The decoupling of income support from production introduced in 2003 helps to facilitate the cultivation of energy crops. In particular, crops that were eligible for direct payments only under the non-food regime on set-aside areas, may now be cultivated on any area without loss of income support.

The set-aside obligation, which was introduced with the 1992 reform, has been integrated into the new single payment scheme. Set-aside land can normally not be used for any type of production, but the cultivation of non-food crops (including energy crops) is authorised if the use of the biomass is guaranteed either by a contract or by the farmer. A special aid for energy crops

was introduced by the 2003 CAP reform. A premium of EUR 45 per hectare (ha) is available, with a maximum guaranteed area of 1.5 million ha as the budgetary ceiling. If applications should exceed the ceiling, the premium will be reduced proportionally.

The sugar reform fully integrates sugar beet cultivation for bioethanol into the support system. No quota system will apply to sugar beet grown for conversion to bioethanol.

Under rural development policy, investments on or near farms, for example in biomass processing, as well as the mobilisation of unused biomass from forests, can also be supported. The new Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005(2) of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) for the 2007-13 period reinforces the EU support and puts forward aids in particular for investment and training in the field of non-food production, in order to create innovative new outlets for production or helping the development of renewable energy materials, biofuels and processing capacity in the rural areas.

Raw materials for biofuel production clearly provide a potential new outlet for Europe's farmers. As underlined by the Honourable Member, the EU is fully supporting biofuels, not only with the aim of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, diversifying fuel supply sources, but also offering new income opportunities in rural areas. The adoption of the Biomass Action Plan and the EU Strategy for Biofuels by the Commission, on 7 December 2005 and 8 February 2006, aim in particular to boost production of biofuels from agricultural raw materials and prepare of large scale use of biofuels.

Protected habitats and species in the EU - P-

1485/06 by H el ene Goudin (IND/DEM) - 5/04/06

The EU has instituted the Natura 2000 network of protected habitats and biotopes for endangered species of plants and animals. The EU's environmental fund LIFE provides financial assistance for the implementation of Natura 2000. In addition, the EU has adopted legislation to protect endangered species and to conserve nature, for example the Wild Birds Directive, the Habitats Directive and the Water Framework Directive.

While the EU seeks to protect species and natural habitats, it also provides many billions in funding for the building of roads and dams which destroy the biotopes of endangered species and precious natural assets. This emerges from the report 'Conflicting EU Funds' which was recently published by the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF). The WWF claims that the EU's policies are contradictory and inconsistent. The successes achieved by means of certain EU resources are destroyed by means of others.

Does the Commission agree with the WWF that the EU's policies are inconsistent, as the Union gives financial support both to measures to protect habitats and species and to projects which damage habitats and species? Will the Commission take any practical measures to establish a more consistent and sustainable policy in this field?

Answer by Mr Dimas - 19/2006

The Commission does not agree with the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) that the EU's policies are inconsistent.

Under the responsibilities of the relevant directorates-general, the Commission has always worked to ensure that EU funded projects are in compliance with the provisions



contained in the nature directives and other relevant legislation of Community law. Cross-compliance is one of the main components of EU environmental policy. The main legislation regulating the interaction between the Community financial support to projects and the protection of habitats and species is Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 of 21 June 1999 laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds and Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

Article 12 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 states that 'Operations financed by the Funds or receiving assistance from the EIB or from another financial instrument shall be in conformity with the provisions of the treaty, with instruments adopted under it and with Community policy and actions, including the rules on ... environmental protection and improvement ...'.

It is the responsibility of the beneficiary Member States, who also have the responsibility for the selection, preparation and implementation of the projects submitted for co-financing, to ensure such conformity. According to the administrative procedures in place, the Commission proceeds with the assessment only of the projects submitted individually (all the Cohesion Fund and the major projects above EUR 50 million financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) on the basis of information submitted by Member States. These projects are subsequently approved only if conformity with the rules of environmental protection and improvement can be demonstrated by this information.

The Commission does not dispose of specific information for all other measures and actions co-financed, but is often informed about problems by citizens or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) concerned directly with complaints or through Parliament petitions

and questions. In these cases the Commission examines the specific issues and takes accordingly a decision with respect to any legal procedure against a Member State (suspension of funds, action in the European Court of Justice, etc.).

For the period 2007-13, a similar provision is proposed. Indeed, Article 8, paragraph 4, of the proposed regulation laying down general provisions on the European Regional development fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund, provides that 'Operations financed by the Funds shall comply with the provisions of the Treaty and of acts adopted under it'. Further to the question of compliance of projects with existing community law, the Commission is already preparing a Communication on Biodiversity that will respond more fully to the priorities identified after a broad consultation process (known as the Malahide process). These priorities include proposals for actions that aim to enhance the consistency and the sustainability of nature conservation policy with other Community policies.

Financial perspective for 2007-13 and the funding of the Natura 2000 network - E-1555/06 by Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL) - 12/04/06

During a recent visit to the municipality of Nisa in Portugal, local officials told the questioner that there was no Community funding for the management of the Natura 2000 network, although the network includes a large proportion of the territory of certain municipalities, as is the case with Nisa.

In December 2005 the European Council reached agreement on the financial perspective for 2007-13. Existing information does not clarify how adequate funding is to be ensured to cover the costs of managing the Natura 2000 network, in particular in view of the fact that there is no specific Community fund to meet this need.

Although the Natura 2000 network is an important Com-

munity instrument for the preservation of biodiversity, it should not jeopardise the sustained development of the regions covered, especially since many of them are convergence regions.

In view of all this and bearing in mind the current negotiations on the Community budget for 2007-13, can the Commission say: 1. why local authorities, especially those with a large proportion of territory included in the Natura 2000 network, do not receive Community support to fund the costs of managing the network, and what measures the Commission will take to solve the problem;

2. what the estimated cost is of managing the Natura 2000 network between 2007 and 2013 and how it will be financed in the future financial perspective and whether the Commission considers the agreement reached in the Council to be adequate;

3. to what Community support the local authorities may have access in order to finance the costs of managing the Natura 2000 network?

Answer by Mr Dimas - 19/06/06

1 and 3. Based on the principle of subsidiarity, it will be up to each Member State and region to decide how to take account of the needs of its Natura 2000 sites in drawing up national and regional programmes under the various funds. The Commission will therefore encourage Member States to give due consideration to the needs of Natura 2000 when establishing their programmes for the Community funds.

To help with the implementation of the co-financing opportunities for Natura 2000, a guidance document on how to use Community funds for Natura 2000 for the period 2007-13 is currently being written. In addition, it is foreseen that workshops will be organised in all Member States, Romania and

Bulgaria, to further communicate these funding opportunities to the interested stakeholders and administrations on the basis of the guidance document.

2. In the communication on the financing of Natura 2000 to the Council and the Parliament the Commission presented its ideas about how the financial needs of Natura 2000 can be integrated into the different Community Funds and what measures can be financed by them. It also presented the likely order of annual costs as being in the region of EUR 6 billion for EU25.

Consistent with this approach, attention was paid to ensure that the needs for funding of Natura 2000 were clearly identified in all the appropriate funding regulations presented by the Commission in the context of the 2007-13 budget proposals.

The Commission would like to indicate that it is not possible to give a precise indication in advance of the amounts likely to be spent annually on co-financing Natura 2000 sites from 2007 onwards. The concrete measures and their financial impact can be known only once all the management plans for Natura 2000 sites are established. In addition, it will be national implementation that plays the most important role. Based on the principle of subsidiarity, it is the responsibility of Member States to develop the appropriate measures in line with the priorities that each Member State will set out.

However, the Commission believes that it is important to ensure that the choice of integrating the funding needs of the Natura 2000 network into other policy areas, as outlined in the above communication, results in sufficient overall funding to secure the objectives of the network.



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The Brussels Briefing

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Further information on specific topics

The Briefing is not large enough to contain the text of all the source materials used to compile it. If you would like further information on specific topics reported in the Brussels Briefing, please contact us - details above.