
GREENING EUROPE

PRIORITIES OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL FOR THE DUTCH PRESIDENCY - JULY TO DECEMBER 2004

Introduction from the Director of BirdLife/Vogelbescherming Nederland

“The Netherlands are a country of birds and people. Millions of migrating birds stop over in our densely populated delta. These birds connect our wetlands, marshes, meadows and countryside with nature all over the world. They make us aware that protection of the world’s nature and environment are crucial for the quality of life both in the Netherlands as elsewhere. As the Netherlands Government takes over the presidency of the EU, BirdLife International and Vogelbescherming Nederland call on the Dutch government to do all it can to ensure that Europe’s natural heritage and environment are given thorough protection. In particular we would like to see the Dutch government take a constructive role in the following areas:



25th Anniversary of the Birds Directive

Birds that cross many borders during their lives, are truly international. So it is not accidental that the first nature Directive is about birds. The celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Birds Directive will be held in the Netherlands in November 2004. This Directive is one of the most sound pieces of bird conservation legislation worldwide. Full implementation of this vital legal instrument will therefore deliver a major contribution to halting biodiversity decline by 2010, as decided at the Gothenburg European Summit in 2001.

Financing of Natura 2000, the network of sites protected under the Birds and Habitats Directives, is a shared responsibility of the Member States and the European Union, using a mixture of measures. Rural Development, Structural and Cohesion Funds and a separate environment fund should be used to provide co-financing for the management of Natura 2000 sites.

Common birds as Biodiversity Indicators

Birds are excellent flagships and environmental indicators. The Pan European Indicator of Common Birds is a ready to use and a clear signal for the general state of biodiversity in the European Union. It shows how far Europe is on its way to halt biodiversity decline by 2010, a goal of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy.

The European Commission should include the Pan European Indicator of Common Birds as a Biodiversity Headline Indicator in the Synthesis report for the Spring Summit of 2005.

Common Agricultural Policy

The Netherlands presidency should encourage the EU Member States to seize the opportunities provided by the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy since June 2003 to adapt agricultural practices to the challenges of enlargement and environmental protection. It should also encourage the adoption of rural development plans that bring about a truly sustainable rural development, with higher funding for targeted agri-environment schemes especially in the new Member States.

Taking these actions and the others described in the following document will contribute to achieving sustainable development and nature conservation in the EU”.



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25th Anniversary of the Birds Directive

2004 is the year of the 25th anniversary of the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC). The *Directive on the conservation of wild birds* was adopted in 1979 by nine Member States, and was the first EU Directive on nature conservation. Since its adoption it has been a vital legal instrument for the conservation of all birds that occur naturally across the EU, acting in the broadest public interest to conserve Europe's natural heritage for present and future generations. Together with the definitions and objectives of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), adopted in 1992, it offers useful legal conceptual models and a set of standards and norms in common use. The Birds Directive applies to all 25 EU countries since May 2004.

It is not a coincidence that the first EU Directive on nature dealt with birds. Birds are beautiful, inspirational and international. They are the most obvious group of organisms for which international conservation action is necessary, as in the course of a year birds on migration may cross many boundaries. Moreover, birds make excellent flagships and act as environmental indicators.

But birds are widely threatened. BirdLife International

analyses show that 40% of the species in Europe are declining, including many farmland birds. The network of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) that should be classified under the Birds Directive is far from complete in many countries. The EU has committed itself to halting biodiversity decline by the year 2010. The full and proper implementation of both the Birds and the Habitats Directive including the proper designation and adequate management of Natura 2000 sites will be crucial to achieving this target.

The Dutch Presidency, in close cooperation with the Commission, will organise a conference called “25 Years of the Birds Directive: challenges for 25 countries” on 7-9 November in the Netherlands. This conference will be an important opportunity to assess the achievements of the Directive and set its conservation agenda for the next 25 years. The conclusions of this conference will be forwarded to the Environment Council for political endorsement.

BirdLife International urges the Dutch Presidency to use this opportunity to build consensus among the 25 countries for full implementation of the Directives and the agreed common actions.

The Dutch Presidency should promote that the Conference Conclusions:

- Emphasize the urgent need for the full implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives for the future and for a Europe of 25, including the completion of the SPA network on land and at sea.
- Highlight the plight of farmland birds in the European Union.
- Stress the importance of setting conservation objectives for all Natura 2000 sites while securing adequate funding to effectively manage the Natura 2000 network.
- Stress the importance of taking measures to counteract the effects of climate change on protected areas.

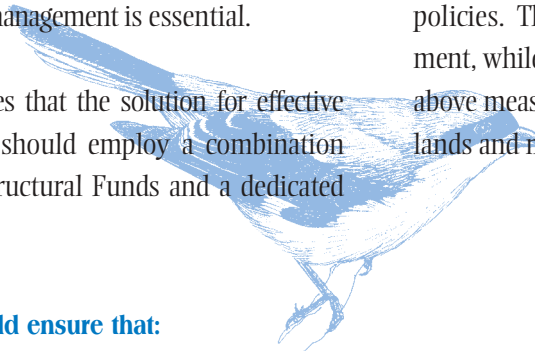


Financing Europe's protected areas: the Natura 2000 Network

The Dutch Presidency will preside over discussions on the Commission Communication on Financing Natura 2000. Ministerial discussion should therefore take place during the October and December Environment Councils.

As the legal establishment of the Natura 2000 Network approaches, the priority in most Member States is shifting towards the long-term protection and management of this important network of sites. Securing adequate financial resources to achieve proper management is essential.

BirdLife International believes that the solution for effective financing of Natura 2000, should employ a combination approach using the CAP, Structural Funds and a dedicated fund for Natura 2000.



The Dutch Presidency should ensure that:

- The Presidency conclusions on the Commission Communication on Financing Natura 2000 reinforce the need for a mixture of required measures in order to effectively co-finance Europe's protected areas.
- Measures include provisions for funding from Rural Development and Structural and Cohesion Funds, as well as funds from a separate environment fund, which will pay for pilot projects, provide co-financing for those habitats currently not covered by other funds, like wetlands and marine, and pay for awareness raising measures.
- All spending dedicated to Natura 2000 be properly monitored and linked to clear biodiversity objectives and priorities.



Agricultural reform

BirdLife International has a vision for a thriving rural community in Europe, which lives and works sustainably within a healthy countryside. This should conserve traditional European landscapes, produce healthy and safe food and maintain an abundant and diverse range of habitats and wildlife.

In the past few decades rural areas have suffered from depopulation and lack of employment opportunities. At the same time, taxpayers and consumers have been left with a legacy of environmental problems brought about by intensive agriculture promoted by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Problems include the degradation of habitats, soil, water and traditional landscapes and the dramatic and persistent decline of EU wildlife.

The Dutch Presidency should:

- Argue for a greater percentage of funds to be shifted from Pillar I to assist rural development policies in Pillar II.
- Support plans to make agri-environment schemes for biodiversity the core of rural development policies in Europe.
- Work to include the objective of halting farmland biodiversity decline in the objectives of the Rural Development Regulation.

EC Biodiversity Strategy Review

The European Community Biodiversity Strategy was adopted in 1998 as the Community's framework for the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The review of the Strategy and its thematic Action Plans (on natural resources, agriculture, fisheries and overseas development) started in 2003 with the view of coming up with a Delivery Plan to reach the EU target of halting biodiversity decline by 2010.

The review has taken place with the involvement of various stakeholders, culminating in the conference "*Biodiversity*

The recent reform of the CAP presents an excellent opportunity to reconcile the interests of the environment, farming and society.

The Dutch Presidency will preside over discussions on how to implement Cross Compliance (eco-conditionality) in the Member States. This should ensure that the Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions scheme is effectively applied in order to respect EU wildlife laws, in particular the Birds and Habitats Directives.

Plans to review the current Rural Development Regulation also represent a timely opportunity to improve its environmental content.

and the EU – sustaining life, sustaining livelihoods" during the Irish presidency. The conclusions of the Conference will be discussed with a view of adoption of a Communication by the Commission.

BirdLife International believes that to-date the process has been lacking in vision, urgency, political support and stakeholder buy-in. With only five years left to reach the target of halting biodiversity decline, the prompt adoption and implementation of the Delivery Plan is essential.

The Dutch Presidency should ensure that:

- The EC Biodiversity Strategy Delivery Plan is finalised in a form that is clear, concise, precise and ambitious.
- The implementation of the Delivery Plan is made a high political priority for all Member States and EU institutions with support from all the relevant stakeholders.

Common Birds as Biodiversity Headline Indicator for the Commission Synthesis Report

The EU Sustainable Development Strategy, agreed at the Gothenburg European Summit in 2001, set the target of halting biodiversity decline by 2010. Three years on, and there is still no way of charting progress towards this crucial target. In order to do this support should be given for a Headline indicator for biodiversity in the European Commission's next Synthesis report.

BirdLife International and the European Bird Census Council (EBCC) promote an existing indicator based on common birds that is statistically robust, representative of diverse environments, and ready to use immediately. This is

the *Pan European Indicator of Common Birds*. The Commission has used this indicator in its 2003 Environment Policy Review. BirdLife International believes this is the best indicator currently available to gauge the state of EU biodiversity for the 2005 Synthesis report.

Birds are not only excellent indicators of biodiversity, but they also indicate the general state of the environment because they occur in the majority of habitats and in substantial numbers. Birds are the only species group for which we currently have data in order to attempt to assess progress towards the 2010 target of halting biodiversity decline.

The Dutch Presidency should ensure that:

- The 2005 Synthesis report includes a Biodiversity Headline Indicator.
- The BirdLife International/EBCC 'Common Bird Index' is included as the Biodiversity Headline Indicator for the Synthesis report for spring 2005.
- The 2004 review of the Sustainable Development Strategy is completed, giving due regard to the environmental dimension and to the adoption of a set of biodiversity indicators.

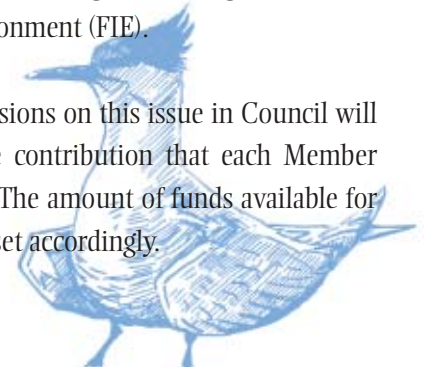
The EU Financial Perspectives

In February, the Commission published a Communication on the future Financial Perspectives for the European Union's budget. The Communication entitled "*Building our Common Future: Policy Challenges and budgetary means of the Enlarged Union 2007 – 2013*", outlines the Commission's views for the budgetary needs of the Union for that period. The Dutch Presidency will preside over discussions on the legislative proposals by the Commission that will follow the Communication, in July.

Once finalised, these legislative proposals will form the Union's budgetary super-structure for 2007 – 2013, and therefore frame major policy directions. A large part of this

expenditure is already 'committed' under the CAP budget, Cohesion policy and other EU policies such as internal market, competition and information policy. However, funding for the environment, the Natura 2000 network of protected areas and biodiversity in overseas territories of EU Member States, are among those that still need to be agreed. The Commission has proposed among other things a Financial Instrument for the Environment (FIE).

It is expected that discussions on this issue in Council will focus on the percentage contribution that each Member State will have to make. The amount of funds available for each policy will then be set accordingly.



The Dutch Presidency should ensure that:

- Financing for the environment, nature and biodiversity do not suffer as a result of Member States contributions negotiations.
- The Council highlights the need for adequate EU co-financing for the Natura 2000 Network of protected areas.

Regional Policy – Structural and Cohesion Funds beyond 2006

Regional policy should promote development, which sustains and revitalises the environment, enhances citizens' social well-being, and creates jobs and economic opportunities. The new Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund regulations must consolidate and build on the principle of environmental protection and improvement. This will be a challenge for the new Member States that have a uniquely rich biodiversity, but also show great social and economic disparities.

The Commission's policy proposals for the future of EU regional policy (published in the Third Cohesion Report in February 2004) are currently open to consultation. The new regulations which will come into force in 2007, should have enough safeguards to prevent damage to Natura 2000 and habitats of endemic and globally threatened species in the dependent and overseas territories of the EU, and dedicate a certain amount of funds to nature conservation.

The Dutch Presidency should:

- Support the requirement in the new regulations that the ERDF, the ESE, the FIFG and the Cohesion Fund co-finance the management of Natura 2000 sites.
- Ensure that the Commission insists that development in Natura 2000 sites is subject to good quality environmental impact assessments in accordance with the Habitats Directive.
- Support the suspension of payments to projects, which damage fauna and flora protected under EC nature legislation.

Trans-European Transport Networks

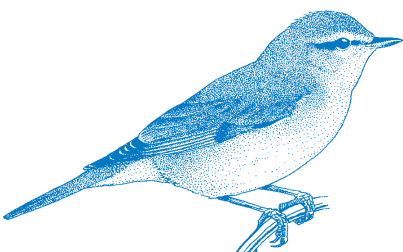
The revision of the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) guidelines was agreed in spring 2004. This revision includes thirty transport projects, worth 220 billion Euro in total.

BirdLife International is seriously concerned that priority TEN-T projects declared of 'European interest' may not fully comply with EU environmental laws, such as the Birds,

Habitats and Water Framework Directives and may have seriously damaging impacts on EU protected nature sites and species, as well as the ecological condition of waters. We are also concerned that the label "priority project of European Interest" has been given to projects before they have been fully assessed from a socio-economic and environmental point-of-view.

During the Dutch Presidency, the EU institutions should:

- Monitor the implementation of the TEN-T in order to ensure that developments are fully consistent with EU environmental Directives. If the appropriate assessments reveal significant negative economic, social or environmental impacts, projects should be changed – or withdrawn from the priority list – in order to avoid such impacts.



Spanish National Hydrological Plan

The Spanish National Hydrological Plan (SNHP), adopted in 2001, will require the development of 863 new water infrastructure projects over the whole of the Spanish territory.

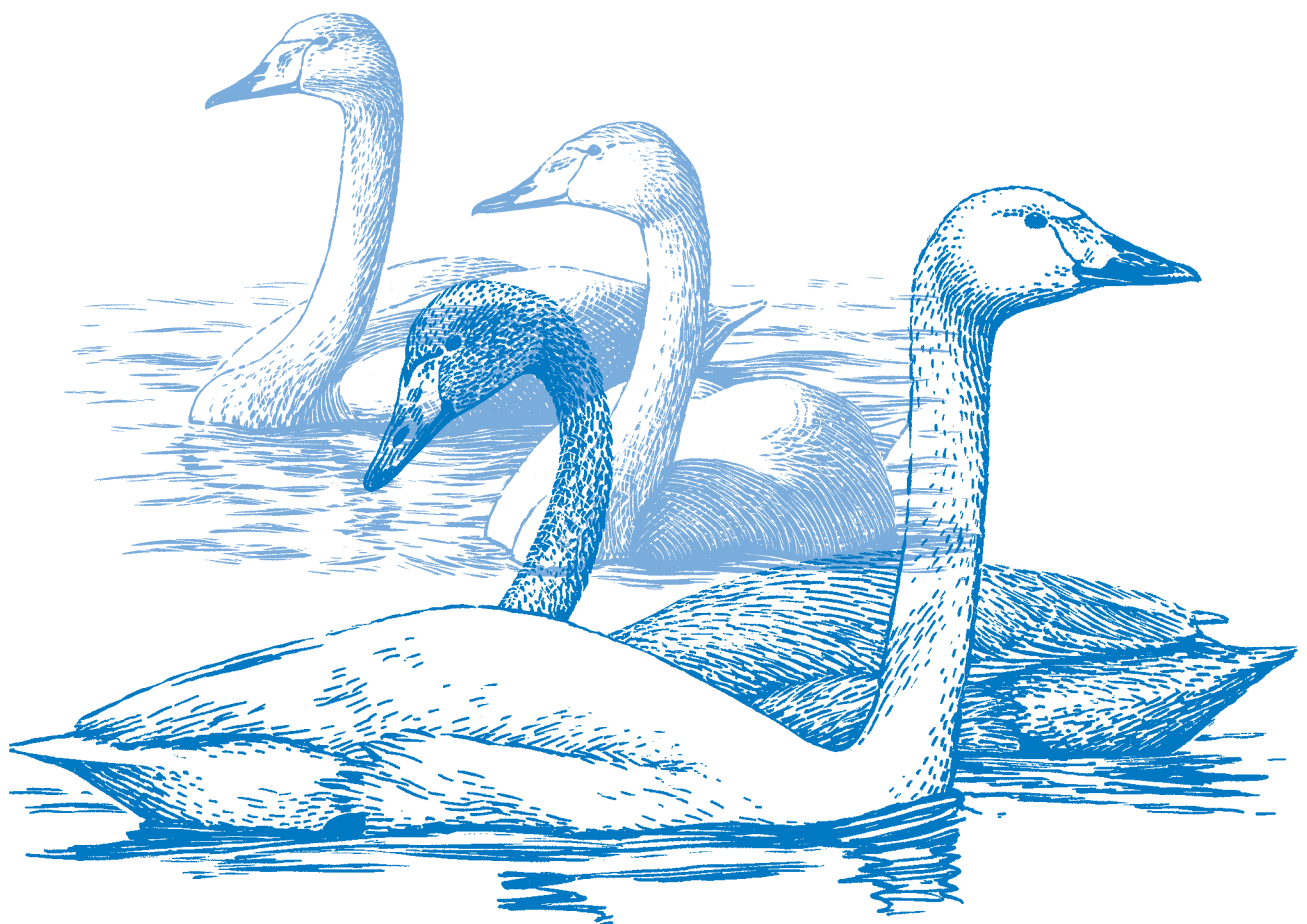
The SNHP has two main parts:

1. a new water transfer of 1.05 billion cubic metres of water per year from the Ebro river to another four basins in the east of the country; and

2. a “package” of individual projects listed in Annex II of the law. It is understood that the new Spanish government intends to abandon plans for the controversial Ebro transfer (part 1 of the Plan). BirdLife International welcomes this decision. However, concerns remain with regard to the impacts of the ‘Annex II’ projects (part 2 of the plan) on protected species such as the Iberian lynx and Spanish Imperial Eagle.

Under the Dutch Presidency, the EU institutions should:

- Promote a new, sustainable water culture in Spain on the basis of sound scientific, technical and ecological knowledge.
- Make a clear statement about the Ebro transfer’s incompatibility with EU environmental laws.
- Review the SNHP in order to ensure that projects are fully compatible with EU environmental laws, particularly the Birds, Habitats and Water Framework Directives. Compliance with EU environmental Directives must be assured before EU funds are allocated to projects.



BirdLife International Partnership

The BirdLife International Partnership strives to conserve birds, their habitats, and global biodiversity working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources.

This memorandum to the Dutch Presidency was produced by the European Community Office of BirdLife International and Vogelbescherming Nederland, the Dutch Partner of BirdLife International. For further information please contact either :

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