

Title



Natura 2000 sites are a key tool for protecting European marine biodiversity under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives. However, there are serious delays from Member States in identifying marine protected areas and even longer delays in developing management plans. The slower and less complete the implementation of the Natura 2000 network, the greater the delay in the maintenance and restoration of Europe's marine biodiversity, including commercial fish species.

The identification of terrestrial Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) has been a flagship programme of BirdLife International since the 1980s and it is globally recognised as a powerful and effective conservation tool. In recent years, the BirdLife Global Seabird Programme, particularly in Europe, has extended this concept to develop scientifically robust methods for the identification of marine IBAs.

The marine IBAs are selected according to solid scientific criteria, after which BirdLife promotes their classification as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) critical to establishing a comprehensive and coherent Natura 2000 network. This is of great relevance as the BirdLife IBA inventories have been recognized by the Court of Justice of the European Union as the list of sites that should be classified as Special Protection Areas under the EU Birds Directive in the absence of other scientific evidence. Birdlife will continue to support the establishment and management of IBAs and their designation as SPAs within the Natura 2000 network to ensure effective nature and species conservation in Europe.

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Natura 2000 is the **centrepiece of EU nature & biodiversity policy**. It is an EU wide network of nature protection areas established under the 1992 [Habitats Directive](#). The aim of the network is to assure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats. [More details](#).



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