

Title

In a press release today, BirdLife Europe brought the attention to the failure of most EU countries to declare a comprehensive network of Marine Protected Areas as mandated by the [EU's Birds Directive](#). This puts most European seabird species at risk and delays urgently needed protection of our marine environment. BirdLife Europe calls upon the European Commission to stop tolerating this unacceptable situation and to start infringement processes in all countries that are breaking EU law. The press release was launched in connection to the [World Ocean Day](#), which falls tomorrow. EU Member States have the legal obligation to protect their marine areas as part of the [Natura 2000 Network](#) under the Birds and Habitats Directives. This applies to their coastal waters up to 200 nm (nautical miles) from land. The EU Birds Directive, which requires Member States to designate a network of [Special Protection Areas](#) (SPAs) has been in force since 1979. In recognition of a widespread lack of progress, the European Commission extended an informal deadline for completion of SPA networks to 2012 in the EU's 2020 Biodiversity Strategy. This deadline has now expired, but after more than 33 years a comprehensive network is yet to be designated. Iván Ramírez, BirdLife European Marine Coordinator said "The situation as of June 2013 is extremely worrying. Two major deadlines have passed and only Germany can claim it has identified both coastal and offshore sites and is already working on site protection and management." He continued "There are other runners-up, such as Belgium and Latvia, but we have major gaps, particularly in Europe's main maritime nations, such as Portugal, Spain, Italy, Ireland and the UK, which are all at the bottom of the league". For many years, Birdlife Europe and its national Partners, have gathered scientific data that has led to the identification of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) across the continent. The IBA inventory has been repeatedly recognised by the European Court of Justice as the scientific reference for the designation of SPAs. Despite all this evidence, just 2% of European seas are protected as [marine SPAs](#). "We have now the scientific data in most of Europe to establish a solid system of marine protected areas for birds, yet lack of political will is hindering real action towards the conservation of our oceans and seabirds", said Johanna Karhu, EU Marine and Fisheries Policy Officer at Birdlife Europe. The EU also has international commitments to live up to, such as the CBD (UN Convention on Biological Diversity) target to protect, by 2020, at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas that are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas. BirdLife Europe is particularly concerned that even countries that have received EU funding, specifically to complete their protected area networks, are not delivering. Typical examples are Portugal and Spain, both with large marine territorial waters and an incredible seabird biodiversity. Both countries finalised their inventories of marine IBAs as a basis for SPA designation back in 2008 thanks to EU LIFE funds, and yet they still have not declared these areas as marine SPAs. Marine Natura 2000 designation is running far behind the designation on land where most IBAs have now been protected as SPAs. This has followed almost two decades of legal cases of the Commission against Member States, mostly triggered by complaints tabled by Birdlife national partner organisations.



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BirdLife International Marine e-atlas, including all EU sites An [Exclusive Economic Zone \(EEZ\)](#) is a concept

adopted at the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (1982), whereby a coastal State assumes jurisdiction over the exploration and exploitation of marine resources in its adjacent section of the continental shelf, taken to be a band extending 200 miles from the shore. Under the Birds Directive EU Member States select the most suitable sites and designate them directly as Special Protection Areas (SPAs). These sites then automatically become part of the [Natura 2000 network](#). [EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020](#)