



Record breaking number of EU citizens call to protect nature

Almost half a million (live updated number <https://www.naturealert.eu/en>)* people called on the European Commission to save Europe's nature laws in a public consultation – by far the highest number of responses ever reached in the history of the EU. The public consultation formally closes at midnight on Sunday.

In May, major environmental organisations (2) launched the '[Nature Alert](#)' campaign (3) in response to the EU Commission's suggestion to evaluate whether the existing EU nature laws should be changed. The campaign makes the case for improved implementation and enforcement of existing rules set out by the laws - known as the Birds and Habitats Directives.

Alongside almost half a million citizens*, more than 120 environmental NGOs have sent a clear message to European decision makers: EU nature laws should not be changed.

The laws protect over 1,000 key species and over 27,000 natural sites in Europe. They have been credited with saving a number of iconic species native to Europe such as the Grey Wolf, the White-Tailed Eagle and the Common Seal (4). As a result, the EU is now home to the world's largest network of protected areas, Natura 2000, which covers almost a fifth of the EU's land.

Scientific evidence shows (5) that the laws effectively protect key endangered species and threatened habitats, and contribute to the socio-economic development of local communities and regions.

In parallel with the public consultation (6), the Commission has consulted with a wide range of stakeholders including national authorities, land users, the business community and environmental NGOs. The vast majority of evidence submitted supports the Directives and points at the need for better implementation and enforcement and for increased funding for conservation. Very few stakeholders have called into question the Directives in their current form and requested a revision of the laws, essentially: some players in the farming sector, the association of private forest owners and the industrial fishing lobby.

At the other end of the spectrum strong support for the Directives has been expressed by other businesses, notably: the Cement industry, Electricity grid operators, Organic farming and Tourism.

Geneviève Pons, Director of WWF European Policy Office said on behalf on the Nature Alert NGO coalition:

“At a time when the European Union is severely tested, the overwhelming support from all corners of the continent for Europe’s nature laws demonstrates that people can get together and defend what really matters to them. Europeans care about their nature, and the Union’s laws that protect it. Now, it is time for the Commission to listen to the evidence and draw up a plan for nature protection based on more funding and stronger law enforcement.”

The official analysis of the consultation is likely to be published in autumn 2015 and a final decision on the future of the laws is expected by June 2016.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

(1) The [consultation](#) has been the only chance for the public to have their say during the technical evaluation. The process of reviewing the Nature Directives began in January 2015 and will take more than a year to complete. In a few months the campaign has generated an unprecedented public response: over 50,000 tweets were sent to Vice President Timmermans and the EU Environment Commissioner Vella to defend these laws. The directives are currently under review as part of wider efforts by the Commission to make sure European legislations are fit for purpose.

(2) [BirdLife](#), the [European Environmental Bureau](#), [Friends of the Earth Europe](#) and [WWF](#).

(3) Nature Alert campaign website www.naturealert.eu

(4) Conservation successes due to the Nature Directives
http://d2ouvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/natura2000_factsheet_final.pdf

(5) The scientific evidence and case studies submitted by environmental NGOs during the Fitness please check:

[Birdlife Evidence](#)

[WWF Evidence Gathering Questionnaire for the Fitness Check of the Nature Directives](#)

[FOE Evidence gathering Questionnaire](#)

[EEB Evidence gathering Questionnaire](#)

Highlights from the scientific evidence:

- The Directives are very effective:
 - Birds listed on the Annex I of the Birds Directive do better in the EU than outside the EU;

- The Directives have helped protecting all species, so not just the species on the annexes;
- There is a huge disaster in farmland, shown by an extensive body of evidence.
- The Directives have revolutionised nature conservation in Europe – they increased the area of protected areas from 8 to 18%.
- The Directives have helped saving places such as the Rospuda Valley in Poland and the Kresna Gorge in Bulgaria.
- There is extensive evidence that the Directives generate huge benefits for minimal costs.
 - It is estimated that the Natura 2000 network generates 200-300 billion EUR worth of benefits every year.
 - Every Euro invested in Natura 2000 generates around seven times more jobs than a Euro invested in the Common Agricultural Policy.
 - The environmental legislation in the EU as a whole generates less than 1% of administrative burden.
- The real problem is a lack of enforcement and a lack of funding for this high quality legislation.
 - Only 20% of the funding needs are currently met.
 - Several dozens of sites have been destroyed, with authorities doing nothing. Especially heavy problems with all kind of works in Italy and with grassland destruction in Germany.

(6) All evidence submitted by stakeholders to the Commission is available here: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/fitness_check/evidence_gathering/index_en.htm

Main highlights:

Strong support for the directives and calls for better implementation, tougher enforcement and increased funding have been expressed by all conservation NGOs, which have also highlighted a range of nature protection issues, notably the consistent failure of the Common Agriculture Policy to support biodiversity conservation. Strong support for the directives has also been expressed in several submissions to the Commission from the electricity grid sector, the Cement industry, tourism industry and financial investors.

A clear attack on the directives with demands that would result in a dismantling of EU nature protection legislation has been expressed (in submissions to the Commission evidence gathering questionnaire) by a few stakeholders, essentially from the farming/forestry/industrial fishing sectors and mainly limited to Germany and Nordic countries. In particular the following are calling for a dismantling of the current protection regime:

- o CEPF (European federation of private forest owners);
- o Europeche (EU industrial fishing lobby)
- o Federation of Swedish Farmers

German farm, forestry, landowners and hunting lobbies have run an e-action calling for the dismantling of EU nature conservation legislation <http://natura2000.forum-natur.de/>.

Most submissions (industry associations, port authorities, energy sector, fishing business, public and municipal forestry and hunters) have not called into question the Directives legal framework but pointed out to a range of implementation problems calling for better consultation with stakeholders, better guidance, improved funding, better knowledge base and improved monitoring and management of sites by public authorities etc.

Contacts:

BirdLife Europe: Luca Bonaccorsi, +32 478 20 62 84, luca.bonaccorsi@birdlife.org

WWF EPO: Stefania Campogianni, +32 499 53 97 36, scampogianni@wwf.eu

European Environmental Bureau, Emily Macintosh, +32 2 274 10 86

emily.macintosh@eeb.org

Friends of the Earth Europe, Paul Hallows, + 32 2 839 10 33,

paul.hallows@foeeurope.org