

Brussels – 12 November 2015

# The verdict is in: Europe's nature laws are fit for purpose

**Key under-review European nature laws deliver far more benefits than they cost, according to a study carried out by international experts for the European Commission.**

Today [Thursday 12 November] the initial findings of the Fitness Check, or 'REFIT', process by the European Commission on the Birds and Habitats Directives have been published.

It's feared the laws, also known as the Nature Directives, could be re-opened, merged or weakened as part of President Jean Claude Juncker and vice-President Timmermans' drive for 'better regulation'.

But the evaluation study, compiled by a panel of technical experts, has found no reason for merging the directives and says they are also coherent with other EU policies and laws.

Further, it spells out the huge benefits provided by the laws when compared with how much they cost. The Natura 2000 network of protected areas, which the laws are responsible for, costs an estimated 5.8 billion EUR per year, but generates benefits in ecosystem services running to 200-300 billion EUR per year and a further 50-85 billion EUR per year for local economies. Overall, the directives make positive contributions to sustainable development and allow economic development which is compatible with maintaining biodiversity.

**Ariel Brunner, BirdLife Europe Senior Head of Policy, stated:** *"The Fitness Check evidence is crystal clear - the Birds and Habitat Directives are fit for purpose and there is no case for 'merging and modernising' them.*

*"The evidence also clearly shows where the real problems lie: poor and uneven enforcement, lack of funding and the impact of perverse policies such as the CAP."*

While the evidence gives no support whatsoever for a need to "merge and modernise" the directives, it highlights how enforcement must be strengthened and for EU policies that are still driving biodiversity loss to be dealt with.

Today's publications come just a week ahead of a crucial event on the Fitness Check process. Conservationists, politicians and representatives of the EU institutions will come together on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> November for a conference on the Nature Directives in Brussels, hosted by EU Environment Commissioner, Karmenu Vella. Additionally, industry body the European Cement Association has today linked up with BirdLife to jointly call for the Nature Directives to be protected.

**ENDS**

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**Notes:**

[1] The *Draft Emerging Findings* report has been prepared by a consortium led by Milieu Ltd, and also comprised of the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP), ICF International and Ecosystems Ltd. for the European Commission's Directorate General Environment. It is available to view here: <http://goo.gl/p67V4P>

[2] A separate report on the public consultation on the Nature Directives is available to view here: <http://goo.gl/7cXyYw>

[3] The Directives have been assessed according to 5 criteria. These are the main conclusions:

\* **Effectiveness** - The Nature Directives are very effective for nature conservation, and “they have also encouraged more integrated management of nature with socio-economic activities”.

\* **Efficiency** - The report finds that while costs of the Natura 2000 network are estimated at 5.8 billion EUR, benefits run at EUR 200-300 billion/year through delivery of ecosystem services with related benefits to wellbeing, while a further EUR 50-85 billion is generated in benefits for local economies through job creation and tourism.

\* **Relevance** - The report states that “The Directives make positive contributions to sustainable development broadly and to specific related goals, such as resource management, health and social benefits. They have been designed to allow economic development when compatible with the Directives’ biodiversity objectives. Although the Directives give primacy to biodiversity objectives in decision making, no evidence has been provided showing that this significantly constrains overall sustainable development”. The directives are also found to enjoy widespread public support.

\* **Coherence** - The report finds no reasons for a merging of the Directives, stating that “the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive are largely coherent, internally and with each other, despite some differences in scope and operational measures”. It finds them also coherent with other EU policies and legislation and with EU international commitments.

\* **Added value** - “The literature reviewed and the responses to the evidence gathering questionnaire all recognise that the Directives have introduced innovative elements that provide added value to what could have resulted without the EU legislation”

[4] BirdLife's joint release with the European Cement Association on the Nature Directives is available here: <http://goo.gl/QnSt7m>

*BirdLife Europe is a Partnership of nature conservation organisations in 47 countries, including all EU Member States, and a leader in bird conservation. Through its unique local to global approach BirdLife Europe delivers high impact and long term conservation for the benefit of nature and people.*