

NATURA 2000

N2K - Why?

In the 70', Member states agreed to do a better job addressing environmental issues at EU level to comply with their obligations derived from International Conventions, and to find solutions to specific ecological problems, including cross border issues. In 1979, the Birds Directive was adopted to protect migratory species, complemented in 1992, by the Habitats Directive, which protects their habitats and those of other endangered species of community interest.

What is N2K network?

The Birds and Habitats Directives require Member States, and eventually their regions, to create a coherent ecological network of areas designed to protect specific fauna and flora. This interconnected network of sites is called the "Natura 2000 Network." Not only the ecological quality of each protected site but also its direct contribution to the global coherence of the network at the local, regional and EU level is analysed. Therefore, similar protection measures are implemented in each of the 25 EU Member States, from Spain to Finland and Ireland to the Czech Republic.



Around 20,000 sites have already been included in the N2K network. Maritime sites are even now being designated. Natura 2000 already covers almost 20% of the EU territory, and soon a majority of EU citizens will live near or in N2K sites.



N2K – Which are the tools?

Under the two Directives Member states have to ensure that in Natura 2000 sites, appropriate measures are taken to :

- avoid any activity significantly disturbing species or damaging habitats for which the site was designated
- preserve, maintain or restore habitats and species in favourable conservation status (FCS)

Within the limits of EU legislation, each Member state decides on the method to use to achieve the goals. Methods have to take into account ecological needs and socio-economic, cultural, regional characteristics requirements of the concerned area.

N2K objective

ELO recalls that the N2K objective is the preservation of most endangered habitats and species of community interest, not the creation of strict natural reserves where human activities would be systematically banned. On the contrary, this is a conception where man has an active role to play, where man contributes to biodiversity enhancement.

N2K includes the sustainable development principle. Its objective is clearly not to get rid of existing socio-economic activities, but to combine biodiversity and socio-economic aspects, pillars of sustainable development.



N2K – participation process

N2K recognizes that man and biodiversity are interdependent. Human activities contribute to the richness of EU biodiversity. Although site designation should consider scientific criteria, management plans also require a close partnership with rural actors, resource holders such as owners, managers, occupiers and users. Because of their know-how, experience and knowledge, they are essential partners for the concrete and successful implementation of N2K.

EU legislation welcomes the development of management plans that aim to bring species and habitats conservation objectives into line with existing socio-economic activities through appropriate means (e.g. management contracts, incentives, LIFE projects).

N2K – Are new activities possible?

New plans and projects that entail important modifications to land use in or near a N2K site are also not systematically banned. Nevertheless, they have to comply with the procedure set up in the Directive for evaluation of their impact.

The first step is to determine if the project is likely to have significant impact on species and habitats for which the site was designated. If the impact is not considered significant, the project will be pursued. If on the contrary the evaluation demonstrates foreseeable negative effects, an alternative, a less detrimental option will be favoured. Some projects detrimental to N2K sites may be pursued for imperative reasons of major public interest. In this circumstance, compensatory measures will be taken in order not to jeopardize the N2K network and its global coherence.



N2K financing

The importance of maintenance of EU biodiversity is recognized at the highest political level. Following the recent changes introduced by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), single farm payments are dependant on maintenance of a farm in good agricultural and environmental condition.

One of the Rural Development Regulation's (2007-2013) aims is to improve the rural environment and the quality of life. Farmers and foresters could benefit from related financial support compensating additional constraints linked to N2K designation. Specific management initiatives going beyond N2K requests could be subsidized under national and EU co-financing. A series of questions on financing N2K remain unanswered and should be resolved after adoption of the EU global budget, the CAP budget, the LIFE section and the various structural funds. N2K success will be highly dependant upon the financing which is really allocated.

Natura 2000 has laudable objectives in N2K sites and even outside of these protected areas for migratory species. These objectives need adequate funding and support from everyone, including rural actors, local and regional authorities, associations and EU citizens.

N2K – Impact on ongoing activities?

Most N2K sites are privately owned and are host to numerous socio-economic activities that often contribute to biodiversity (agriculture, forestry, fish farming, tourism, leisure, fishing, hunting, recreational activities).

Obviously these activities are possible in or near N2K sites. If adaptations or modifications to these uses are necessary, the feasibility of these proposals have to be negotiated with rural actors and financed.

N2K – ELO involvement and action

ELO is closely following N2K as the management of assets and their value is closely dependant on the interpretation of these Directives and their implementation in the field. As has been stated, ELO clearly advocates for a balanced implementation of N2K and sound financing at the EU, national and local level. Clearly in some case N2K has not been adequately financed or implement in the field, notably during the designation process or on occasions where there has been a ban or limitation of specific uses without compensation.



In the meantime, ELO also launched actions promoting N2K awareness among rural actors and demonstrating their positive contribution to N2K, such as the Natura 2000 Networking initiative - NNI (in collaboration with Eurosite-Europarc), the “From Belgium to Europe with Natura 2000” campaign, and dedicated actions towards new Member states (CZ, POL...).

ELO also punctually provides support to its members throughout the EU on N2K implementation, when it can lead to repeatable solutions across EU member states. ELO also promotes good implementation and management of sites through its Awards programme.



Therefore ELO actively participates in EU consultation processes aimed at interpreting specific articles of the Directives, such as the Article 8 Working Group (co-financing, stand still), the Steering Group on N2K financing, the Article 12-16 Working Group (strict liability, ecological and legal definitions), Biogeographical seminars, and other discussions focused on Article 17 (monitoring, annexes). ELO is also working on the interpretation of N2K, which has also been increasing the constraints outside of N2K sites, as supported by the species protection approach of the Habitats Directive. ELO is also leading a dedicated forum of EU federations of users also involved in N2K implementation and management, the Natura 2000 Users' Forum.



Birds Directive 79/409/EEC; Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC Commission dedicated “Nature” webpage:
www.europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/home.htm