The Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process

Discussion & background paper
on strategic orientations and future development

DRAFT – 7 March 2016
The purpose of this short discussion paper is to suggest elements for adapting the strategic orientations for the further development of the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process in the coming years. The paper is a revised version of the draft that was presented and discussed at the 13th meeting of the Expert Group on the Management of Natura 2000 (November 2015). That paper has been updated on the basis of feedback received from the members of the group.

The background paper in annex describes the overall orientations and operational developments envisaged. Adapting the strategic objectives would include the following:

1. To strengthen and focus the work of the Process in contributing to meeting the EU 2020 Biodiversity objectives, primarily the full implementation of the nature directives (Target 1), i.e. the improvement of conservation status.

The idea is to focus the current approach on improving the conservation status of a set of habitats and species that will be defined over the coming months region by region. Defining this set of habitats and species shall make full use of the results of the 2015 State of Nature exercise by using the reported data to the utmost extent. The criteria for selection shall also take account of where improvements of conservation status are relatively ‘easy’ to achieve in a biogeographical region, i.e. consider harvesting the ‘low hanging fruits’. Once the habitats and species are defined, joint strategies and plans (‘roadmaps’) in working together towards the favourable status shall be the focus of the work (in seminars, workshops, etc.).

2. To develop, discuss and work on implementation strategies for biogeographical level favourable reference values (FRVs)

In the frame of the review of the Art.17 reporting process a range of MS had requested further work on FRVs. In a sub-group of the Expert Group on Reporting this work is now taking place with the support of a contractor (Alterra). The question of testing the setting of FRVs on biogeographic level is part of this work and this aspect, once developed a bit further, should be addressed by the Process for example through follow-up actions and thematic events.

3. To strengthen the marine aspect of the process

So far the process has mainly dealt with terrestrial systems. As the marine network nears completion, at least in coastal areas, work on marine ecosystems in an early stage of site designation & objective setting becomes very important. The marine systems depend even more on collaborative approaches between MS (e.g. control of fisheries), the challenges of marine conservation are less well understood and in many ways pressures on marine features are less controlled and regulated. All this requires a special focus on marine features in the coming years to make the marine Natura 2000 network a success and sufficient support by Member States to establish the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process also at sea.
4. To continue facilitating and further developing the cooperation between Member States, stakeholder organisations, environmental NGOs and specialist networks on the management of Natura 2000 as a coherent ecological network.

The process will continue to promote cooperation between Member States, stakeholder organisations, environmental NGOs and specialist networks through the establishment of a practical framework for networking and help putting in place practical management actions designed to improve or maintain favourable conservation status. At the same time, the process will encourage active involvement of interested stakeholder groups.

The NADEG is asked to express its views as to the aspects set out above.
This background paper describes the orientations and operational aspects for the future implementation of the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process, including the Natura 2000 Seminars.

1. The strategic objectives of the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process

The aim of the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process is to support Member States and expert stakeholders to achieve progress towards legal requirements and ensure that Natura 2000 effectively contributes to meeting the EU 2020 Biodiversity objectives, primarily the full implementation of the nature directives (Target 1). It is and will remain a practical framework to support knowledge building, cooperation and networking on the management of Natura 2000 at the biogeographical level, aiming at achieving coherence in management, monitoring, financing of, and reporting on the Natura 2000 Network and involving Member States, expert stakeholders, practitioners and the European Commission working together in a spirit of collaboration and cooperation.

In concrete terms, the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process provides a means to analyse and interpret results from reporting on species’ and habitats’ conservation status at a biogeographical level, to identify major threats and to establish corresponding biogeographical level conservation objectives, to engage in active cross-border cooperation and networking between all actors involved in the management of Natura 2000 and to make commitments and recommendations for future action. The management of bird species and their habitats is also a possible topic for the Process.

Through making increased use of relevant data from Article 12 and Article 17 reports, the Process will concentrate on enabling target oriented implementation of the Nature Directives with a view to achieving favourable conservation status for habitat types and species of community interest.

The **strategic objectives** of the Process are:

- To ensure significant and practically oriented progress towards the EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy targets, in particular Targets 1 and 2, through improved and strengthened implementation of Natura 2000, and help Member States to fulfil their legal obligations under the Nature Directives;
• To strengthen common understanding of the critical role of the Natura 2000 Network in achieving favourable conservation for habitat types and species subject to protection in Natura 2000¹;

• To identify future priorities and conservation objectives for Natura 2000, based on relevant data from Article 12 and Article 17 reports, and facilitate the formulation of ‘strategic cooperation objectives’, which can be applied and implemented at biogeographical level;

• To establish a practical framework for networking that helps put in place practical management actions designed to improve or maintain favourable conservation status for those habitats and species that fall within Member States’ territories;

• To develop cooperation between Member States, stakeholder organisations, environmental NGOs and specialist networks that will lead to new ‘know-how’ to support the achievement of FCS.

2. Working together in the Natura 2000 Biogeographical process

The focus of the Process in general and the Natura 2000 Seminars in particular should be forward looking. This includes identifying forms of cooperative actions that will contribute to achieving progress towards the EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy targets and to implement them. The idea is that while every MS has to take its responsibility for implementation, such implementation (on the features that are focus of the Process) should be guided by joint strategies and also be monitored. It certainly also involves specifying those areas requiring common attention in future and how these can be developed and delivered. The ways of working together under the Process are subject to continuing review and development. The views of the EC’s Expert Group on the management of Natura 2000 and of the ‘Nature Directives Expert Group (NADEG)’ are central with this regard. They are therefore playing a central role in steering the Process and we should reflect on the respective roles of these 2 bodies in relation to the future implementation of the Biogeographical process. The main essence of the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process will remain the continuous exchange of information, networking and cooperation between all actors involved in the management of Natura 2000, be they national or regional competent authorities, stakeholder organisations, scientific or nature conservation institutions, etc. Activities under the process can take multiple forms, such as periodic Natura 2000 seminars per biogeographical region, thematic workshops, field trips, ad-hoc expert

¹ There will be a need to examine ways of improving coherence with outcomes of work on assessing the conservation status through monitoring and reporting under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive and the results of the Birds Directive Article 12, especially with regard to eventually determining how best to build a common understanding of what needs to be achieved for different habitats and species to reach FCS.
meetings, etc. A limited number of networking events may benefit of technical and financial support under the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Programme (contact: natura2000platform@ecnc.org).

The Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process offers many opportunities in widening the engagement of other (non-environmental) sectors, as well as a means to ‘open up’ Natura 2000 to greater numbers of local stakeholders. The engagement of diverse sectors and multiple stakeholders is essential to improve the discussions on land management, develop synergies and enable the development of strategic conservation objectives, which also take into account socio-economic and cultural aspects related to Natura 2000.

The Natura 2000 Communication Platform\(^2\) finally represents a key tool of the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process. This web based platform is updated regularly with key documents resulting from the process, as well as project-related information, past and planned events and contact information.

### 3. The role of the Natura 2000 Seminars

The Natura 2000 Seminars must be viewed as milestone events to help sharpen the focus on the strategic targets to be achieved and identify corresponding cooperative actions. They also provide opportunities to periodically review the results of the Process, but to do so with a view to the future: a primary outcome from all future seminars being to scope a ‘Roadmap’ of agreed future collaborative actions, where the Process can be used to address shared strategic priorities that have been identified across the respective region.

The seminars can be formed and structured according to the needs of the main stakeholders in the Process. This ensures that each Seminar reflects the character and scope of joint working potential identified as being most useful within each biogeographical region. For each seminar, detailed programmes are developed in close consultation with the European Commission and the respective Steering Committees, as well as the host country or organisation.

Whilst allowing for such flexibility though, to ensure consistency of approach and comparability of results from the Seminars in different biogeographical regions, it is proposed that there would be three common objectives for all future seminars:

- To review results so far of the follow-up activities from previous seminars and issues that have yet to be addressed; and,
- To identify priority conservation issues with corresponding biogeographical level conservation objectives and cooperation actions, based in particular, on the latest State of Nature Report;
- To agree on a ‘Roadmap’ of future (existing or planned) collaborative actions.

In concrete terms for example, the Natura 2000 Seminars can be developed and used, in order to address relevant issues or questions, such as:

- What lessons can be learnt from the results of the Article 17 (Habitats Directive) and Article 12 (Birds Directive) assessment of the conservation status of habitat types and species of Community interest?
- Can favourable reference values be usefully defined at the biogeographical, national, regional or site levels? If so, how can these be harmonised between Member States?
- Developing joint strategies and plans/roadmaps for a set of habitats and species that are considered low hanging fruits when it comes to reach favourable conservation status.
- Setting favourable reference values jointly for wide-ranging species, particularly those with transboundary populations
- Identifying common priorities for conservation and restoration actions with reference to Restoration Priority Frameworks (RPFs);
- Defining biogeographical level targets for conservation and restoration. How will this determine the establishment of conservation objectives at different levels?
- How can the effectiveness of conservation measures for achieving favourable conservation status be evaluated?

The 2015 State of Nature Report provides the latest information about the conservation status of the habitats and species of Community interest. It also provides an analysis of the threats and pressures being faced, as well as of the trends being observed. The results will be a significant source of input and point of reference for the Natura 2000 seminars. In addition, the findings of the Fitness Check of the EU Nature legislation will have to be considered. Making use of Articles 12 and 17 data to identify ‘low hanging fruit’, the Process will enable Member States and expert stakeholders to work collectively towards favourable status targets for those species and habitats where improved management approaches and practices can be implemented as ‘quick wins’: it will also help to identify other areas where knowledge gaps exist currently and more concerted efforts may be required.

Each Seminar should also provide the opportunity to identify where the greatest scope lies for future collaboration and cooperation actions to be implemented for Natura 2000 in a given biogeographical region. In some cases, there may also be value in working across regions, especially where there is likely to be opportunities to share experiences and compare approaches in certain fields – for example, in management approaches for extreme weather events/climate change.

4. The structure and organisation of the Natura 2000 Seminars

Natura 2000 Seminars are being organised at regular intervals, for example every three to four years, as felt useful by the Member States and expert stakeholders within each Biogeographical Region. Each seminar is hosted by a Member State or organisation in
the respective region. It is co-organised by the host country or organisation and the European Commission, with the technical support by the contractor of the Commission (currently ECNC and Consortium).

For each seminar a 'Seminar Document' is being prepared. This document summarizes the results achieved by the Process since the previous seminar and provides up-to-date information on conservation status and threats. It is the basis for discussion on possible recommendations or agreements on road maps for concrete actions and future priorities for cooperative actions. The results of the seminars are published in the 'Seminar Reports', including agreed priorities and concrete actions.

5. Practical arrangements and indicative timetable

All practical arrangements for the organisation of the seminars are discussed and agreed as appropriate in the context of the EC’s Expert Group on the Management of Natura 2000, the NADEG and the respective regional steering committees.

Reflecting experience to-date and feedback generated, each Natura 2000 Seminar programme will in principle:

- be organised over 2.5 or 3 days (maximum);
- Continue to include field visits as an integral component;
- Involve (and potentially increase the number of) practical case studies and presentations from experts with direct experience of Natura 2000 management – for example, these will be based on experience with LIFE or Interreg Projects, national or regional initiatives for Natura 2000 etc.;
- Retain the 'Knowledge Market' as a key element of the programme – potentially, there may be scope to increase impact through the Knowledge Market by inviting wider cross-sectoral participation;
- Support effective face-to-face networking on practical Natura 2000 management issues through a mix of interactive techniques, facilitated group work and plenary discussion sessions;
- Be supported with concise background documentation (for example, experience has shown that there is little value in or need for a 500 page Background Document).

In terms of preparing for the future seminars, there is also an opportunity to reconsider the current usefulness of and/ or ways to improve several aspects of how the Natura 2000 Seminars have been organised in the past:

- The nomination and invitation process currently used to identify Natura 2000 experts within each Biogeographical region;
- Opportunities to include representation from a wider range of stakeholders;
- The technical and scientific background provided in the form of the Seminar Documents;
- The form and structure of seminar programmes to-date, including common features, such as the field visits and the Knowledge Market, as well as the plenary sessions.
### Indicative timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biogeographical Region</th>
<th>'Kick-off' Seminar</th>
<th>Thematic events</th>
<th>Next seminars (indicative)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boreal</td>
<td>May 2012</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td>October 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic</td>
<td>December 2012</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td>November 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alpine</td>
<td>November 2013</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td>2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
<td>May 2014</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td>2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Macaronesian</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>as from 2016</td>
<td>2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continental, Pannonian, Black Sea, Steppic</td>
<td>June/July 2015</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td>2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marine</td>
<td>May 2015</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td>2018</td>
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