



EC acts to improve nature protection

First posted on http://ec.europa.eu/unitedkingdom/news/ec-acts-improve-nature-protection_en

The European Commission has agreed a new [action plan](#) to improve the protection of nature and biodiversity in the EU. The Commission is also asking the UK to implement EU environmental laws on the conservation of blanket bogs.

28/04/2017

The action plan will benefit people across the UK, for instance by improving air and water quality. It is based on a wide consultation, with extensive participation by the UK government and by British NGOs, academics and others.

It consists of 15 steps to be carried out by 2019 to rapidly improve the implementation of the [Birds and Habitats Directives](#), the EU's flagship nature policies. There are four overall priorities:

Improve guidance and knowledge – for instance on site permit procedures and species protection – and ensure better coherence with broader socio-economic objectives;

Build political ownership and strengthen compliance: the Commission will work with national and regional authorities, landowners and other stakeholders to improve implementation and overcome challenges;

Increase investment in Natura 2000 and improve use of EU funding. The

Commission will dedicate more EU funding to projects supporting the conservation of nature and biodiversity, by reallocating funds under the LIFE programme, the EU's funding programme for environment, nature conservation and climate action projects. **The Commission will stimulate private sector investment in nature projects through the [Natural Capital Financing Facility](#)**, a financing partnership between the Commission and the European Investment Bank providing tailored loans and investments. The Commission will also promote synergies with funding from the Common Agricultural Policy, including the [European Agricultural Rural Development Fund](#), [Farm Advisory Services](#), and the [European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability](#). Finally, it will support the deployment of green infrastructure for better connectivity of Natura 2000, and support nature-based solutions through EU research and innovation policy and Horizon 2020 funds;

Better communication and outreach, engaging citizens, stakeholders and communities.

[More information](#)

In a separate announcement, the Commission is urging the **United Kingdom** to stop burning blanket bog habitats within upland Natura 2000 sites in England and to take measures to restore the damaged habitats. Blanket bogs are considered to be priority habitats under the [Habitats Directive](#) when they are non-degraded, and their conservation status in England is seriously declining. For a number of years, the UK authorities allowed the damaging practice of burning blanket bogs within the English Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), without the appropriate assessment required by the Habitats Directive. The Commission warned the United Kingdom of those breaches of the Habitats Directive in a letter of formal notice sent in April 2016. As the burning of blanket bog habitats within the protected sites still continues, a final warning is now sent. The UK has two months to respond; otherwise, the case may be referred to the Court of Justice of the EU.

Background

These Birds and Habitats Directives are the largest coordinated network of biodiversity-rich protected areas in the world ([Natura 2000 network](#)), covering more than 24% of land and sea in the EU. These protected areas alone

contribute between 1.7 and 2.5% to EU GDP through the provision of ecosystem services such as carbon storage, water purification, pollination and tourism. The Action Plan adopted today is about improving the management of these areas, connecting nature protection and socio-economic activities more broadly, and engaging with national authorities, stakeholders and young people.

The Directives were subject to a 'Fitness Check' which provided an overall performance evaluation of their effectiveness and efficiency as part of the Commission's Regulatory Fitness and Performance (REFIT) programme. Germany and the UK provided the greatest number of replies to the online consultation which was part of the overall evaluation.

The Commission [concluded](#) that the Nature Directives are fit for purpose but achievement of their objectives and realisation of their full potential will depend upon substantial improvement in their implementation both in relation to effectiveness and efficiency, working in partnership with different stakeholder communities in the member states and across the EU to deliver practical results on the ground.