

# Themes selected for the fourth Natura 2000 seminar for the Mediterranean region

Four themes were identified for discussion at the fourth Natura 2000 seminar for the Mediterranean biogeographical region. During the first day of the seminar discussions will focus on the progress with the pledge and review process. The following additional themes were selected between the Cypriot host and the European Commission for discussions during the second and third day of the seminar:

- Theme 1: Strictly protected areas in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030
- Theme 2: Site-specific conservation objectives
- Theme 3: Favourable Conservation Status/Favourable reference values
- Theme 4: Natura 2000 management effectiveness

## **Theme 1: Strictly protected areas in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030**

According to the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, at least 30% of the EU land and EU sea areas should be protected in the EU by 2030, one third of which – representing 10% of EU land and 10% of EU sea area – should become **strictly protected**. To facilitate the preparation of these EU-level targets, Member States have been asked to make pledges showing how they will meet the protected area targets until 2030.

Participants in previous biogeographical seminars in 2023 emphasized the challenges of establishing additional protected and strictly areas, but also highlighted that there are still uncertainties in terms of defining what can be counted as a “strictly protected area”.

According to a Commission Staff Working document<sup>1</sup> *“Strictly protected areas are fully and legally protected areas designated to conserve and/or restore the integrity of biodiversity-rich natural areas with their underlying ecological structure and supporting natural environmental processes. Natural processes are therefore left essentially undisturbed from human pressures and threats to the area’s overall ecological structure and functioning, independently of whether those pressures and threats are located inside or outside the strictly protected area”*. The same document also mentions that *“strictly protected areas may also be areas in which active management sustains or enhances natural processes, such as semi-natural grasslands or some peatlands.”*

During the seminar, discussions under theme 1 will focus on the challenges in terms of designating new strictly protected areas, as well as on the question how “undisturbed natural processes” is to be understood in situations where active site management is needed. The objectives of this thematic session are therefore to discuss and reach a common understanding on the following questions:

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<sup>1</sup> Criteria and guidance for protected areas designations. Commission Staff Working Document. SWD(2022) 23 final

- What are the main challenges for designating strictly protected areas and how can they be overcome?
- How is the concept of “undisturbed natural processes” to be understood in the case of species, habitats and sites that require an active conservation management?
- Which activities or uses can be considered compatible with the concept of undisturbed natural processes?

## **Theme 2: Site-specific conservation objectives**

The EU Habitats Directive requires the establishment of **Site-specific conservation objectives** for the Natura 2000 sites, as a basis for defining the statutory, administrative or contractual measures which correspond to the ecological requirements of the natural habitat types in Annex I and the species in Annex II present on the sites (Art. 6). The Directive furthermore provides that the Natura 2000 network of sites shall enable the natural habitat types and the species' habitats concerned to be maintained or, where appropriate, restored at a favourable conservation status in their natural range (Art. 3).

The objectives of this thematic session are to discuss and reach a common understanding on the following questions:

- What kind of information and what level of detail is required in the site-specific conservation objectives to ensure that they can usefully contribute to the setting of conservation measures at site level?
- What kind of information and what level of detail is needed in the site-specific conservation objective to ensure that they can usefully contribute to the achievement of favourable conservation status?
- What are the experiences so far in terms of setting site-specific conservation objectives for species and habitats in the Natura 2000 sites in the Mediterranean biogeographical region?

## **Theme 3: Defining Favourable Conservation Status/Favourable Reference Values**

The definition of “favourable conservation status” of species and habitats requires the determination of quantified Favourable Reference Values (FRV) at national biogeographical region level for the following parameters: “range” (species and habitats), “population size” (species) and “area” (habitats).

The general objective of this thematic session is to exchange on existing approaches and best practices for setting FRV in Mediterranean Member States, with a particular focus on quantification aspects.

The Commission has recently launched a survey amongst the members of the Nature Directives expert group (NADEG) on their current practice of setting favourable reference values, on the main challenges they face, as well as on suggestions for improving the current EU guidelines. Some of the results of that survey will be presented during this break-out session.

The specific objectives of this session are to discuss and reach a common understanding on the following questions:

- What are the experiences so far in terms of setting favourable reference values for species and habitats in the Mediterranean biogeographical region?
- Are there any good practises or positives experiences among participants and more broadly in the EU from which participants can learn?
- Are there Mediterranean region-specific aspects or issues to consider when setting FRVs?

#### **Theme 4: Effective management of Natura 2000 sites**

While the legal designation of Natura 2000 sites throughout the EU and the setting of site-specific conservation objectives and measures is making progress, a major remaining challenge is to achieve an effective management of all sites. The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 includes a specific commitment to ‘Effectively manage all protected areas, defining clear conservation objectives and measures, and monitoring them appropriately’ by 2030.

Considering that the development of a methodology on how to measure and report management effectiveness is currently underway, the purpose of this session is rather to focus on the question how to improve the actual management effectiveness on the ground. The specific objectives of this session are therefore to discuss and reach a common understanding on the following questions:

- Which key ingredients are needed for an effective management of Natura 2000 sites?
- How could practical experiences be shared amongst Member States and regions to support a more effective site management?