



## **General Assembly Documents**

**22<sup>nd</sup> October 2012**

### **Paper 9**

#### **Title**

**Report to General Assembly: Networking for Nature**

#### **Recommendation:**

**To adopt the Strategic Development Framework to  
combine EUROPARC and Eurosite**



## “NETWORKING FOR NATURE”



### A Strategic Development Framework to combine EUROPARC and Eurosites

#### Introduction & Update

Europe’s natural heritage is a myriad of habitats and ecosystems, sculpted by nature, shaped by man. On our crowded continent, protected areas form natural refuges within a wider landscape and are more valuable than ever as repositories for nature, sanctuaries for human well-being and regional economic drivers: fundamentally, these refuges provide Europe’s life support systems.

Nature knows no boundaries: therefore, in order to sustainably and effectively manage these natural resources, EUROPARC and Eurosites believe that the future protection and conservation of nature are achieved through international co-operation. International cooperation works best through personal contact; that through personal contact comes mutual understanding, shared experiences, knowledge and innovation. This delivers better support and management of protected areas, which ensures the future protection and conservation of nature, because especially in Europe, nature knows no boundaries. This is why EUROPARC and Eurosites seek to build a strong, united voice for Europe’s natural heritage - that will be THE **network for nature**.

Eurosites and EUROPARC are seeking to create one, network organisation. Together, we have identified the opportunity, which best meets the needs of our respective members currently, and builds on the strengths of both our networks’ rich histories and achievements to reach our future innovation potential.

As approved in September 2011, our agreed joint end-goal is to realise a stronger, unifying, European network organisation that is better placed to respond to the challenges facing Europe’s natural heritage. Key aims for the organisation envisaged are:

- To better integrate and recognise our members’ work;
- To enhance our capacity to work with partners, and to generate added value benefits essential for Europe’s natural heritage;
- To become a single organisation bringing greater efficiency and cost effectiveness, whilst eliminating duplication.

In terms of the planned strategic development process, the Eurosites Board and EUROPARC Council have approved Networking for Nature to be jointly presented during the 2012 General Assemblies. A previous draft of this paper has been circulated to members as part of a joint consultation process in June this year. The Joint Committee has taken feedback received into account in developing this new draft version of Networking for Nature.

## **Operational Context**

Integration of environmental concerns into other policy areas is one of the basic principles of environmental policy: it is enshrined in Article 11 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and it also has implications in European countries beyond the EU27. However, economic pressures and budget cuts for nature conservation work are requiring core objectives and priorities to be re-thought. This comes at a time when biodiversity loss continues and the impacts of climate change require urgent attention. In a fragmented landscape, under increasing pressure from various sources including climate change, land use and competing demands, the scale of the threats merit concerted 'on-site' action: also, increasingly, there is a need to manage all protected areas with reference to their wider surroundings and in terms of their key importance for Europe's natural heritage, its people and communities.

This context necessitates change and holds significant opportunities - saving biodiversity is not optional: how it is used, managed, resourced and prioritised is important. Radical, new, better integrated approaches and more innovative funding mechanisms are required. Greater ecological coherence, increased protection for biodiversity and improved sustainability for our natural heritage and its resources are urgently needed.

We envisage a new network that builds on the best qualities of Eurosite and EUROPARC. It will be dedicated to practical nature conservation and sustainable development of Europe's biodiversity, fostering holistic landscape approaches. This involves and requires effective conservation, restoration and management of functioning ecosystems, where protected areas are integral components of a European landscape and ecosystem network, inclusive of areas beyond designated sites. Protecting Europe's natural heritage through fundamental principles of international cooperation and inclusivity will be central to the new network.

## **Strategic Direction & Development Framework**

Looking to the future, the opportunity endorsed by members in September 2011 is to create one network that is able to deliver services that rise to the considerable challenges facing Europe's nature and meet the common needs of members. Our goal is to realise the formation of the new network as **the major 'green voice'** for integrated nature conservation management across Europe. Uniting national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty, Natura 2000 sites, regional and nature parks and biosphere reserves in one representative organisation will send a powerful message. The new network will constitute a positive force in, for example, strengthening the implementation of Natura 2000, developing workable ways to achieve targets contained in the EU's 2020 Biodiversity Strategy, and in providing a gateway for the involvement of diverse stakeholders in those processes.

The combination of practice-based experience, technical expertise and sustainable development initiatives in integrated protected area management within one network organisation will create a dynamic platform for representation of members' shared interests and priorities. Furthermore, combining current strengths across these service areas will enable protected areas to be managed more holistically, recognising their importance for nature, people and the wider natural landscape.

The strong European network organisation formed by uniting the memberships of Eurosite and EUROPARC will be based on the following principles:

- **Our focus** - on improving the quality of management and practice across Europe's protected areas, ecosystems and landscapes;
- **Our primary strength** - harnessing the knowledge, experience and expertise of our members to improve development and strengthen implementation of relevant policies;
- **Representation** - the common interests and priorities of members, and provide a strong voice and positive influence to policy and decision makers, acting as a platform for inclusive dialogue with diverse stakeholders in Europe.

As a membership based organisation, the network's strategy will be defined and re-defined by the operating contexts and priorities of its members across three (integrated) core areas:

- **Management of nature** - integrating protected areas as core elements of functioning ecosystems, vital for biodiversity, people and sustainable development, taking into account their central role in the wider landscape;
- **People & organisational development** – building practical capacity and promoting good nature conservation practice for protected areas and the wider countryside at site, inter-site and transboundary levels. As well as developing nature conservation staffs' professional skills, this will also include people-focussed initiatives, such as volunteering, working with young people and also, for example, with visitors in public outreach campaigns;
- **Advocacy and representation of members' interests at EU and global levels** – building dialogue with the EC and other partners, and providing a communication gateway to and from European and other global institutions across a range of policy and governance matters relevant to members' priorities.

Specific objectives and clear targets will require to be developed jointly in due course. Detailed implementation plans will then require to be developed to deliver the outcomes and objectives identified, once the core content of a new joint strategy is agreed by the respective general assemblies – these will also provide a basis to measure the new network's performance. The priority at this stage is to seek consensus about the strategic direction and the following proposed mission, vision and function statements.

## **Mission**

***To promote landscape scale integrated management of European natural heritage by improving the quality of nature conservation and sustainable development practice***

'Networking for nature' is vital to ensure that Europe's rich natural heritage is managed on a landscape scale and according to the best possible practice. Combining the expertise of organisations pre-eminent in nature conservation and its management, together with expertise in socially inclusive approaches for nature, creates a needed, powerful and dynamic network. The new network provides a platform for international cooperation amongst our members and between our partners to share experience and stimulate innovation that will improve the quality of integrated management in and for our common natural heritage.

## **Purpose**

***To serve the needs of members and support the work of partners: to enable them together to achieve greater results for Europe's natural heritage.***

The primary purpose is two-fold: to help members achieve more firstly as individual organisations, and secondly, by functioning together collectively as a network. We will work in partnership to achieve better-integrated management of natural resources by:

- Stimulating networking amongst members;
- Improving existing practices;
- Applying new ways of working and encouraging innovation;
- Increasing understanding about emerging priorities relevant to members' work; and,
- Fostering effective relationships within and outwith the network.

The network will aim to improve current strong service areas provided by Eurosite and EUROPARC, including, for example, representation in Brussels, building practical capacities in site management know-how and sustainable development initiatives. Also, one network will aim to achieve improved effectiveness and greater efficiency for members: for example, outputs will be streamlined, especially in terms of communications and news services, as well as capacity building initiatives. There will be greater opportunities to complement core network services by securing projects in areas that reflect members' priorities. With a wider membership base, the network will be better positioned to develop links and act to positively influence partners through other established fora. It will aim to maintain and grow its membership in pursuit of its strategic objectives. At the same time, the network will be better placed to explore new ideas and formulate new initiatives that meet members' interests.

## **Function**

***The network will bring together innovative knowledge-based expertise in conservation management and sustainable development, for the benefit of Europe's natural heritage.***

To achieve its mission, the organisation will encourage the proactive involvement of members. This is of critical importance and will be supported by a governance structure, which will facilitate and co-ordinate network business to best serve members. Subject to further discussion and development, example core themes are indicated as being, to:

- Foster and facilitate innovative networking and inclusive approaches, providing a platform to involve multiple stakeholders in caring for Europe's natural heritage;
- Showcase members' work and their priorities and represent their common interests;
- Develop a range of practical capacity building initiatives for the benefit of members;
- Promote the value and benefits of protected areas to wide audiences, including the public;
- Deliver activities of direct benefit to members, their staff and our partners.

A more expansive list of suggested service areas is attached in Annex 1. Added value will be realised by working collectively, focussing on generating practical benefits for members and, in particular, their staff - practical information, expertise and ideas will be harvested and shared to produce real, innovative learning opportunities, essential for up-scaling operations, delivering greater efficiency and optimising impacts. Delivering inspiring and motivational services for people will be a key goal – building on current, strong methods, such as workshops, seminars and conferences, new approaches are likely to become increasingly important, including for example, e-learning and joint research opportunities.

## **Closing Remarks**

Our joint aim, agreed in September 2011, is to realise a stronger, unifying, European network organisation that is better placed to respond to current and future challenges facing Europe's nature. This development strategy aims to provide a framework to be used jointly to underpin the establishment of a network dedicated to practical nature conservation and sustainable integrated management of Europe's nature and natural heritage.

As a first step, discussion and agreement by the general assemblies of both organisations, during the General Assemblies on 22 October 2012, about the strategic direction, mission, purpose, function and practical joint development actions are essential to underpin the shared commitment to realising the new network organisation.

Networking for Nature is jointly proposed as the basis for subsequent further development, involving a full consultation process with and inputs from members. The further development process for this strategy will involve full consultation with members. Subject to the views of members, this is planned to take place in the period from October 2012 up to and in preparation for presentation at the joint AGM in October 2013. In tandem, an outline operational work plan to deliver the new strategy will also be presented for implementation in the first full operational year of the new organisation, 2014.

Thomas Hansson  
President EUROARC Federation

Henkjan Kievit  
President Eurosite

## **Annex 1**

### **Building on current strengths - indicative areas of focus proposed for the new network**

Subject to further discussion and development in due course, potential areas of focus for the new network are likely to include, but are not restricted to, for example:

- Functioning as a platform for experience sharing and competence building for protected areas managers, with special focus on, for example:
  - Natura 2000 management;
  - Ways to enhance habitat connectivity across landscapes;
  - Adaptive site management approaches;
  - Access and visitor management;
  - Stakeholder engagement techniques;
  - Marine and coastal management issues;
- Cross-cutting, thematic and policy-related issues including, for example:
  - Financing for nature conservation;
  - Links with or impacts from non-environmental sectors, such as agriculture;
  - Branding of nature;
  - Interpretation, education and public engagement measures;
- Advocating the need for strengthened and integrated implementation regimes for nature protection and conservation management;
- Continuing to promote and role-out people-inclusive, sustainable development initiatives, such as the EUROPARC Charter for Sustainable Tourism; in Protected Areas
- Representing the voice of members to positively contribute to European level policy dialogue.

Current ways of working will continue to be important – for example:

- Routine and regular communication on issues, filtered for relevance to members' interests, combined with improved feedback mechanisms.
- Regular email-based news;
- Working groups on specific subjects elected for and led by members;
- Sharing of best practices of specific subjects, usually in the form of providing core material for case studies;
- Participative workshops, conferences and seminars: all members will have access to presentations and outputs from such events, even if they are not able to participate.

This list of service areas is not exhaustive and is offered indicatively at this stage. Determining such work areas depend on available resources and require to be responsive to the needs of members. Members will be central to the selection and determination of services to be provided by the new network.

Subject to the wishes of members, in due course, there are also new areas to be explored for potential development including, for example, cost-covering study tours, other practice-based learning opportunities and developing links to academic institutions to explore new ways to provide professional development.