

Brussels - 18 May 2015

## EUROPARC position on Birds and Habitats Directives

The EUROPARC Federation is the network for Europe's natural and cultural heritage. The Federation works to improve the management of Protected Areas in Europe through international cooperation, exchange of ideas and experience, and by influencing policy.

EUROPARC members have the responsibility for the management of almost 10% of the whole Natura 2000 network and play a crucial role for the implementation of the EU Nature Directives.

Following the inputs received from our constituency during recent workshops, meetings and a dedicated internal consultation, we are expressing here our views to contribute to the Fitness Check process on EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

- **Ensure effective implementation**

Natura 2000 covers almost 17% of the EU land and plays a fundamental function for the conservation of habitat types and species across Europe. Despite the fact that its implementation started already in 1992, the process has not been finalized yet by member states. While the designation of sites is almost completed (at least on land), its effective implementation and the establishment of conservation measures are still in a germinating phase. That's why we consider that a more comprehensive evaluation should rather take place after the full implementation of the two directives. The main current priority should now be to ensure their effective implementation. Any change of direction, at this stage, would be premature and might undermine achievements from the last 20 years.

- **Strengthen cooperation and enforcement**

Nonetheless, some challenges, mainly concerning the improvement of the implementation process, which seems quite slow, have still to be faced. To ensure a successful implementation of the Directives it is fundamental to promote better cooperation, at national and regional level, among different competent authorities. We recommend to the European Commission to improve the enforcement and oversee, from closer, the way in which EU Nature Directives are implemented in member states.

EUROPARC believes that N2000 is as strong as all member states and partners can deliver: a joint commitment to strengthen the process is needed. Quite weak implementation processes combined with national-regional administrative differences seem to challenge the achievement of the objectives set in the directives.

- **Ensure site management**

A stronger effort should also be made to ensure that Site management is effectively implemented. EUROPARC considers that the following actions should be further promoted: improve coordination among EU countries, harmonise priorities and actions in

transboundary sites, value the role and expertise of national and regional designated protected areas in the management of N2000 sites, support site managers in developing and implementing management plans.

- **Improve communication**

Improving the communication of the Natura 2000 network to better value its socio-economic and environmental benefits is also considered crucial. This would help to build more political support and to reduce conflicts with different stakeholders. Regular technical seminars within the different biogeographic regions, the exchange of good practices among member states and site managers, together with European awards and European Days (for N2000 and Parks) are great tools that should be further promoted. Regular exchanges among EU countries and with relevant stakeholders are crucial.

- **EUROPARC and Natura 2000**

EUROPARC strongly stresses that no regression can be made on EU Nature legislation: Natura 2000 is proving its effectiveness, providing clear benefits both for biodiversity and civil society. Natura 2000 is Europe's lifeline and, together with all other protected areas across Europe, it ensures the interconnection with the broader natural heritage and contributes to integrate the values of nature and the ecosystem services within the wide society.

EUROPARC Federation, with its wide network, is willing to play its active role and to provide support and expertise to members and partners (European Commission, EU countries, local authorities and Protected Area managers) towards a more effective implementation of the Directives. A joint effort is necessary at this stage to ensure in the short-term concrete progresses and further benefits for biodiversity and society in Europe.

Ignace Schops  
EUROPARC President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ignace Schops', written over a horizontal line.