

# **HABITATS DIRECTIVE ARTICLE 17 REPORT ( 2001 – 2006 )**

## **AN OVERVIEW OF ARTICLE 17 REPORTING**

This paper is part of the web-based Article 17 Technical Report (2001-2006)  
<http://biodiversity.eionet.europa.eu/article17>  
compiled by the European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity for the European  
Commission (DG Environment)

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ETC/BD, Paris, 2008

## AN OVERVIEW OF ARTICLE 17 REPORTING

The 1992 EC Habitats Directive requests all Member States to undertake surveillance of habitats and species considered to be of Community interest and listed in Annexes I, II, IV & V. Article 17 of the Directive requires that Member States prepare reports to be sent to the European Commission every 6 years on the implementation of the Directive following an agreed format. The first reports were for the period 1994-2000 and primarily addressed the transposition of the Directive into national laws and the progress towards identifying and designating Special Areas of Conservation. The report for the period 2001-2006 for the first time includes assessments on the conservation status of the habitats and species of Community interest. The assessments are for the 216 habitats and 1 182 species listed in Annexes in their entirety and not just for the habitats and species within the Natura 2000 network (Sites of Community Interest / Special Areas of Conservation).

Discussions for a reporting format began in 2004 with discussions held by the EC Habitats Committee and its Scientific Working Group together with dedicated workshops organised by the European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity (ETC/BD). This led to the reporting format being adopted by the Habitats Committee in March 2004<sup>1</sup>. Supplementary guidance was provided by the Commission in 2006<sup>2</sup>. Further discussions led to an agreed methodology for preparing assessments for biogeographical regions based on the Member State reports<sup>3</sup>.

The Article 17 reports prepared by Member States have three sections; (i) general information about the implementation of the Directive, (ii) the assessments of conservation status of species and (iii) for habitats. Conservation status was assessed using a standard methodology which was to facilitate aggregation and comparisons between Member States and biogeographical regions. Conservation status is assessed as being either 'favourable', 'unfavourable-inadequate' and 'unfavourable-bad', based on four parameters as defined in Article 1 of the Directive. The parameters for habitats are range, area, structure and functions and future prospects and for species they are range, population, habitat of species and future prospects. Member States were encouraged to use expert opinions where there was insufficient data to inform judgements. However, where there was great uncertainty it was also possible to report the conservation status as 'unknown'. The assessments of the four parameters were combined following an agreed method to give an overall assessment of conservation status.

A separate assessment was carried out for each biogeographical region<sup>4</sup> present in a Member State. Where a Member State is entirely within one region, such as Luxembourg, only one report was required. If a Member State is present in two or more biogeographical regions a separate report was required for each biogeographical region. For example for *Bombina variegata* (yellow-bellied toad) the report

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<sup>1</sup> Assessment, monitoring and reporting of conservation status – Preparing the 2001-2006 report under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive. Note to the Habitats Committee, DG Environment, Brussels, 15 March 2005

[http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/env/monnat/library?l=/habitats\\_reporting/reporting\\_2001-2007/reporting\\_framework&vm=detailed&sb=Title](http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/env/monnat/library?l=/habitats_reporting/reporting_2001-2007/reporting_framework&vm=detailed&sb=Title)

<sup>2</sup> Assessment, monitoring and reporting under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive: Explanatory Notes & Guidelines October 2006

[http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/env/monnat/library?l=/habitats\\_reporting/reporting\\_2001-2007/guidelines\\_reporting&vm=detailed&sb=Title](http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/env/monnat/library?l=/habitats_reporting/reporting_2001-2007/guidelines_reporting&vm=detailed&sb=Title)

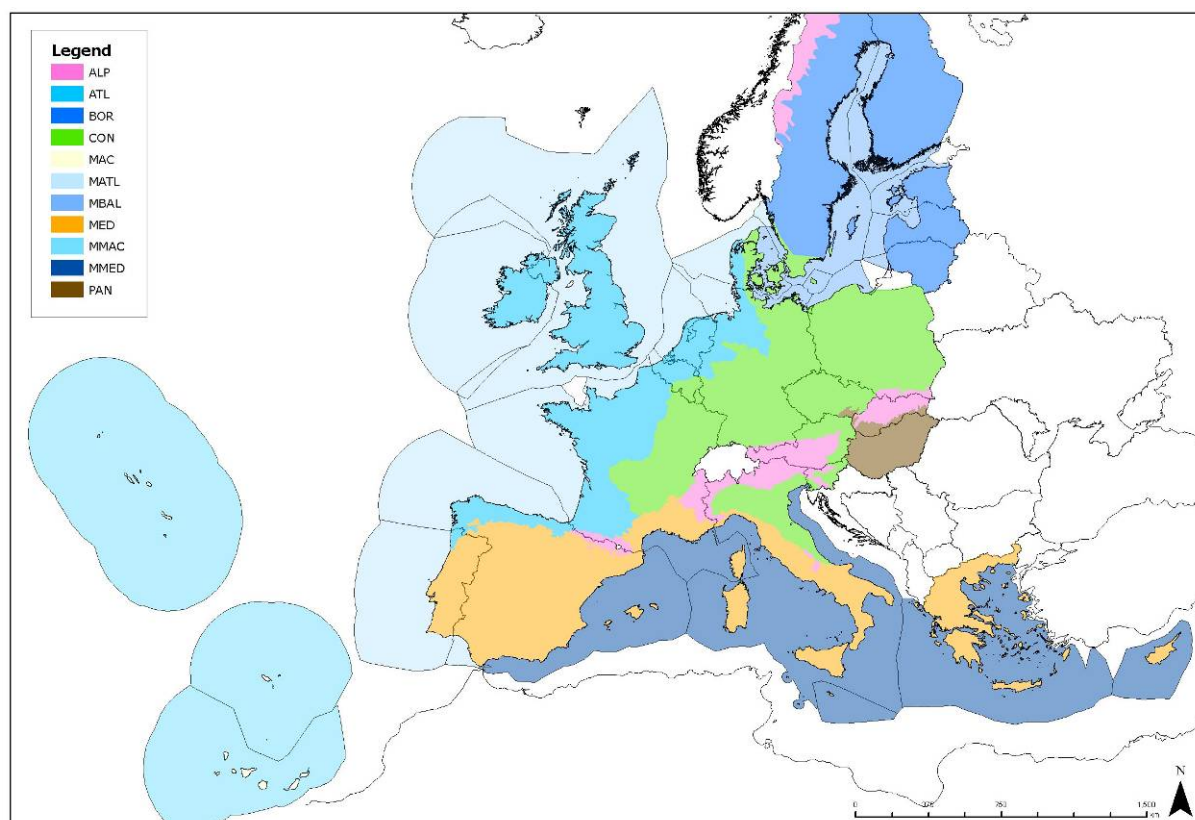
<sup>3</sup> Article 17 Reporting – Habitats Directive - Guidelines for assessing conservation status of habitats and species at the biogeographic level

[http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/env/monnat/library?l=/habitats\\_reporting/reporting\\_2001-2007/biogeographic\\_assessment&vm=detailed&sb=Title](http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/env/monnat/library?l=/habitats_reporting/reporting_2001-2007/biogeographic_assessment&vm=detailed&sb=Title)

<sup>4</sup> Alpine (ALP), Atlantic (ATL), Boreal (BOR), Continental (CON), Macaronesia (MAC), Mediterranean (MED) and Pannonian (PAN)

prepared by Germany provided separate assessments for the species for the Alpine, Atlantic and Continental biogeographical regions where the species is found.

For marine habitats and species reports were made for four marine regions: marine Atlantic (MATL), marine Baltic (MBAL), marine Macaronesian (MMAC) and marine Mediterranean (MMED). These regions are based on reported Economic Exclusion Zones or other territorial claims and were prepared purely for reporting under Article 17.



**Figure 1 - The biogeographical and marine regions used for Article 17 reporting**

The Member State reports were transmitted using a web based IT tool developed by the European Environment Agency (EEA) with a check of data quality and completeness by the ETC/BD. In the light of these checks, Member States were asked to consider amending their reports as necessary. All 25 Member States reported although Malta and Spain sent their report too late to allow for corrections. Bulgaria and Romania did not join the European Union until January 2007 and therefore were not required to submit reports.

There were 2 756 separate reports for habitats and 6 064 for species from the Member States, together with some 16 000 associated maps. The Member State assessments are available on the internet (<http://biodiversity.eionet.europa.eu/article17>).

Once all the Member State reports were available the ETC/BD produced assessments for biogeographical regions as explained below. This led to 701 habitat assessments and 2 240 species assessments. This was aided by the IT tool which was also used to present the results. A public consultation was held from 28 July to 15 September 2008, again using the IT tool. Over 100 participants - bodies and individuals - made observations and provided comments on the Member State and the biogeographical region assessments. Member States also had a final chance to make final

corrections to their data. As a result of this consultation the ETC/BD revised a number of assessments and used the information received to help draft its comments. A guide<sup>5</sup> was prepared for participants which explains the function of the website.

The biogeographical assessments used the same classes and parameters as for the national assessments. Where possible, range and area (habitat)/population (species) were assessed using the same method as for national evaluations but missing data or the use of different units for reporting populations often meant this was not possible. In these cases, and for the other parameters, the Member State assessments were weighted and the percentage of the habitat/species falling in each class was compared against agreed thresholds to give an assessment for the region. The choice of weighting followed an agreed order of preference:

Order of preference	Habitats	Species
1 <sup>st</sup>	Area (from MS data)	Population (from MS data)
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Area (from GIS data)	Distribution area - area of 10 km x 10 km grids (from GIS data)
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Range (from MS data)	Range (from MS data)
4 <sup>th</sup>	Range (from GIS data)	Range (from GIS data)

The following thresholds have been used, they are applied in sequence:

- If more than 25% 'unfavourable-bad', then 'unfavourable-bad' overall
- If more than 75% 'favourable', then 'favourable' overall
- More than 25% 'unknown', then 'unknown' overall
- All other combinations, 'unfavourable-inadequate'

These thresholds are to some extent arbitrary but tests using a range of thresholds showed that the overall assessment is not very sensitive to the thresholds chosen. Where an assessment was particularly sensitive to thresholds or the weighting used this has been noted.

In a small number of cases no regional assessment was possible.

The Article 17 website allows access to the Member State assessments of conservation status and the biogeographical assessment. It also presents maps showing the range and distribution of the habitats and species and brief comments prepared by the ETC/BD. To facilitate easy access to the information a datasheet has been prepared for each habitat and species.

The assessments are discussed in the paper 'Overview of conservation status' available in the Article 17 web page.

This is the first systematic assessment of the conservation status of the habitats and species of Community interest. For many habitats this is the first time it has been possible to produce distribution maps for the European Union or to have an estimate of the total habitat area. For species, the reports

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<sup>5</sup> Article 17 reporting consultation on the conservation status of habitats & species  
[http://biodiversity.eionet.europa.eu/article17/Art%2017\\_consultation\\_notes.pdf](http://biodiversity.eionet.europa.eu/article17/Art%2017_consultation_notes.pdf)

presented here update existing distribution maps and the assessments of conservation status provide a useful addition to the IUCN Red Lists for the groups where available.

As the habitats and species listed in the Annexes of the Directive were chosen, at least partly, because they were known to be threatened, it should not be surprising that so many have been assessed as being 'unfavourable'. For many of these habitat and species conservation action is already underway, this report will help identify other habitats and species which also need further action.

Some species were reported as 'occasional' or 'vagrant' with no or little further information; this was particularly the case for many marine species, including whales and dolphins. In some instances this may be an early indication of species changing their range, possibly as a result of changing climate.

This report also highlights species and habitats for which there is a lack of information, either for individual countries or more generally. For instance it is clear that marine habitats and species are less well known than most terrestrial habitats and species. This report will help identify priorities for future research or more focused monitoring.

This is the first time such an exercise has been attempted and many problems have been encountered, both by the Member States, the Commission and the EEA-ETC/BD. Some of these are due to lack of harmonisation in the way data has been collected and been reported. Work is already underway to consider how these problems can be resolved to enable improvements for the next report which will cover the period 2007-2012. These problems are discussed in more detail in the section on data quality and completeness.

These reports and the associated data sets will be of interest to many groups, including conservation agencies and researchers, and will inform policy at both European Union and national level.