

HABITATS DIRECTIVE ARTICLE 17 REPORT (2001 – 2006)

ARTICLE 17 REPORTING SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

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

ARTICLE 17 REPORTING - SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

The methodology and results from the 2001-2006 Article 17 reports are described in a series of documents with the data and assessments available via the Article 17 web page (<http://biodiversity.eionet.europa.eu/article17>).

This document is intended to highlight a small number of issues considered of particular importance. In all cases, further information is available in the full reports and a list of these reports is given at the end of this report.

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For the first time the conservation status of the European Union's most endangered habitats and species have been assessed using a standard methodology

Twenty five¹ Member States of the European Union have assessed the conservation status of 1 180 species and 216 habitats across their territories using an agreed methodology and from these reports the ETC/BD has derived assessments for biogeographical and marine regions. Although IUCN has produced regular global assessments of species², we believe this is the first time that the conservation status of habitats has been assessed across such a large area or for so many countries (assessments for the USA or Australia cover areas comparable with the EU but are single political units).

(The Terrestrial Ecoregions of North America: A Conservation Assessment (Ricketts, et al, 1999) covers three countries and is the nearest similar piece of work, it relies very heavily on expert judgement and the habitat classification is not linked to legislation)

As well as assessing conservation status, the Article 17 reports give the first EU wide inventory of the extent and spatial distribution of 216 habitat types listed on Annex I of the 1992 Habitats Directive (the remaining habitat types only occur in Bulgaria and Romania) and an important update for many of the species, particularly for those groups where the IUCN assessments are now dated.

The assessments and supporting data will be an invaluable resource for informing policy and for further research. Already scientific papers and reports are being published incorporating results at national level (*e.g.* National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2008; Sohlman, 2008)³ and many more are expected.

An introduction to the Article 17 report is given in the report 'AN OVERVIEW OF ARTICLE 17 REPORTING'.

¹ Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU on the 1st January 2007 and were not included in the 2001-2006 report

² See <http://www.iucnredlist.org/>

³ National Parks and Wildlife Service (2008) The status of EU protected habitats and species in Ireland. Dublin
Sohlman, A. (Ed.) (2008). Arter och naturtyper i habitatdirektivet – tillståndet i Sverige 2007. ArtDatabanken SLU, Uppsala.

Most habitats and species of Community interest are not considered to have a favourable conservation status

Both country and regional assessments show that only a small proportion of the habitats and species listed in the annexes of the 1992 Habitats Directive are considered to be at 'Favourable Conservation Status'. 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 require action

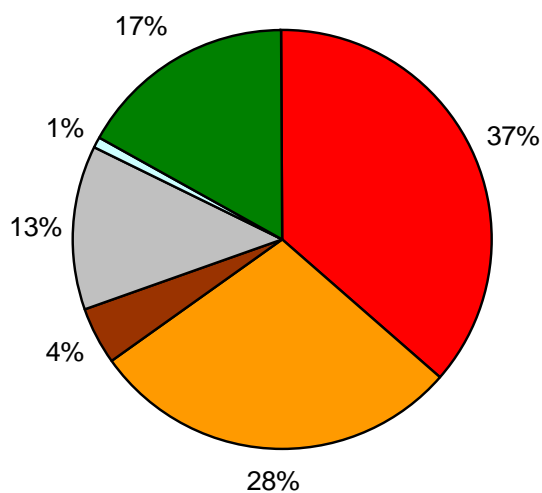


Figure 1 - Assessment of conservation status of Annex I habitats

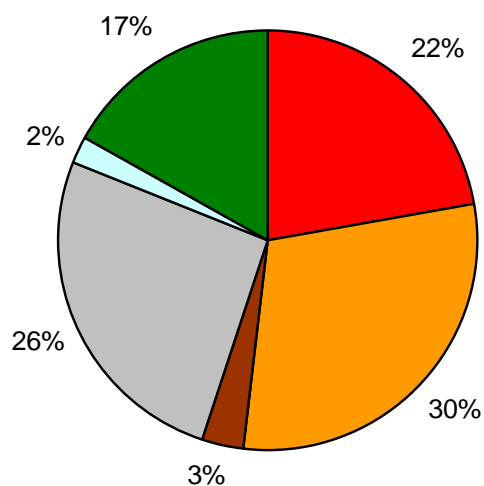


Figure 2 - Assessment of conservation status of species

This is discussed in more detail in the report 'OVERVIEW OF CONSERVATION STATUS'.

The Alpine region has the highest proportion of habitats assessed as 'favourable' and the Atlantic the lowest

Thirty three percent of habitat assessments in the Alpine region are favourable, the highest of any terrestrial region, but there are no favourable assessments from the Atlantic region. The Alpine region also has the lowest percentage of assessments as 'unfavourable-bad'. The Mediterranean region has the lowest proportion of 'unfavourable' but this is largely due to a high percentage of 'unknown', and if the Mediterranean region is excluded, the Alpine region also has the lowest percentage of 'unfavourable'.

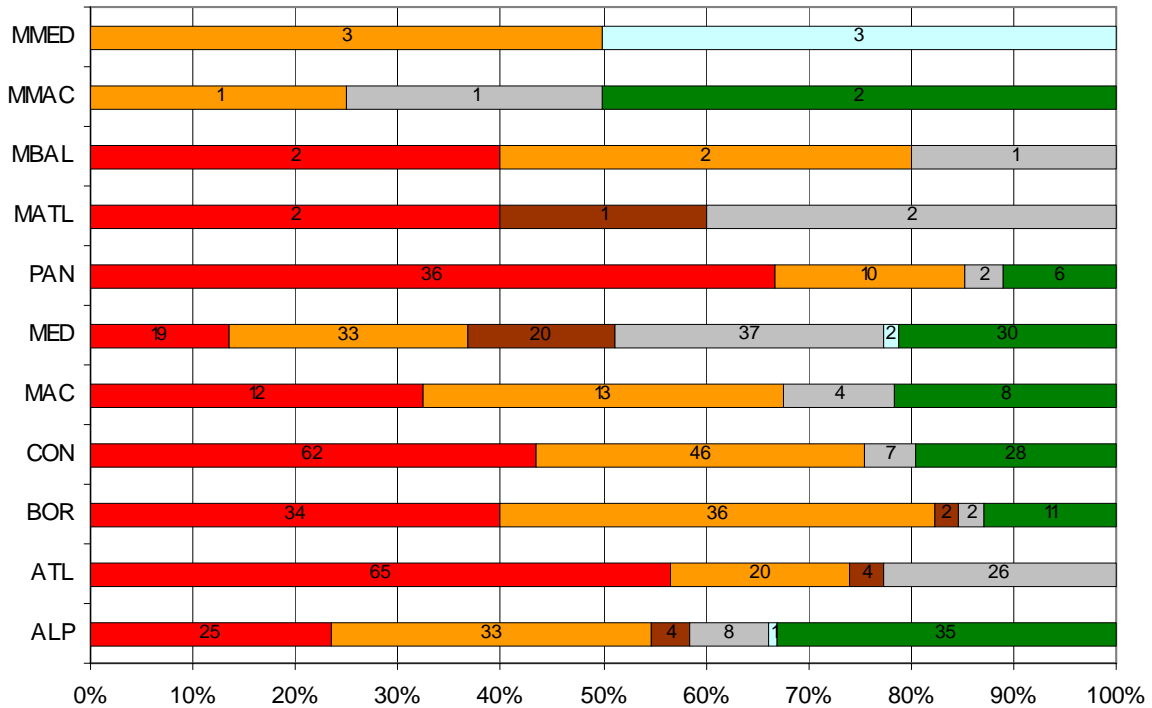


Figure 3 - Assessment of conservation status of habitats in the different biogeographical regions (numbers in the bars indicate the number of assessments)

Mountainous regions have often been the focus of protected areas in many countries for many years (e.g. in France only one of the six national parks is not in the mountains) and the pressures and threats are less than elsewhere.

This is discussed in more detail in the report 'OVERVIEW OF CONSERVATION STATUS'.

The Boreal region has the highest proportion of species assessed as 'favourable' and the Continental the lowest

Thirty two percent of species assessments in the Boreal region are favourable, the highest of any terrestrial region, while the lowest was the Atlantic with 7%. The Atlantic was also the regional with the highest proportion of 'unfavourable-bad' although the Pannonian region has the highest proportion as 'unfavourable'. However the proportion of 'unknown' is very high in some regions for species, reaching 45% for the Mediterranean.

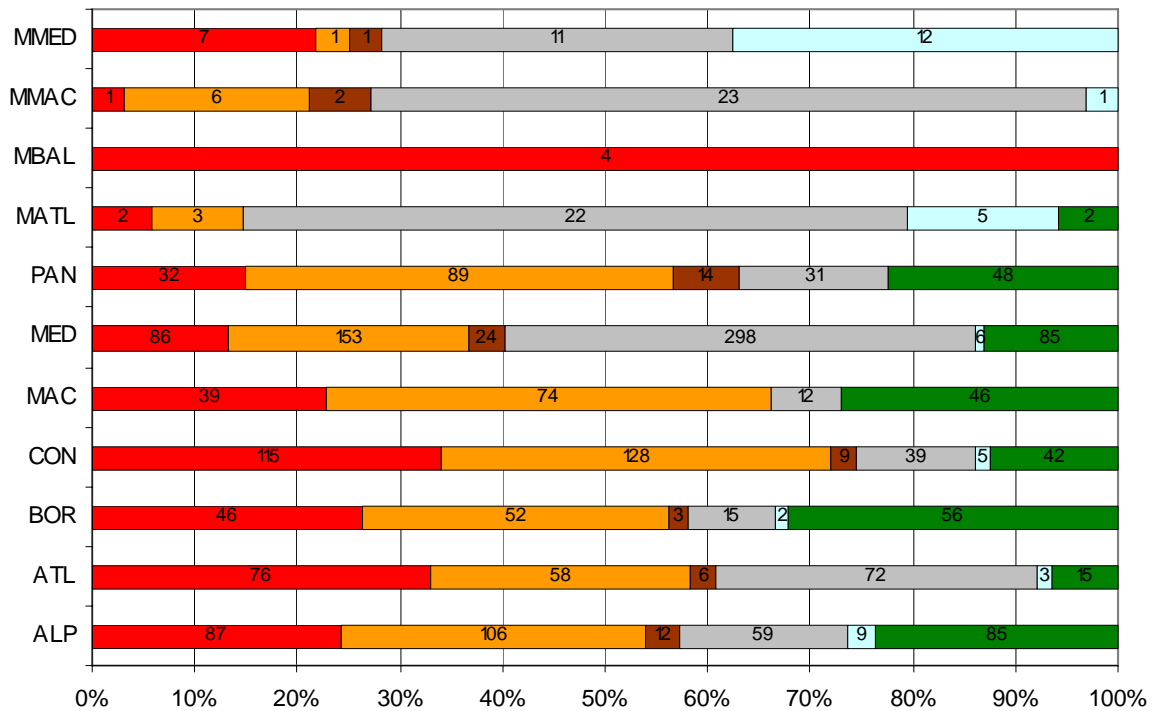


Figure 4 - Assessment of conservation status of species in the different biogeographical regions (numbers in the bars indicate the number of assessments)

This is discussed in more detail in the report 'OVERVIEW OF CONSERVATION STATUS'.

Dunes, bogs and grasslands are the habitat groups with the worst conservation status

Amongst the nine major groups of habitats included on Annex I, sand dunes, bogs, mires and fens and grasslands have the highest proportion of assessments as 'unfavourable' and the lowest as 'favourable'. In contrast, the habitat group with the highest percentage of assessments as 'favourable' is the group of rocky habitats – mostly cliffs and screes which are relatively little threatened other than by direct destruction (*e.g.* quarrying, road construction) or by indirect threats which affect all habitats such as climate change or pollution.

Amongst the dune habitats, only one of sixty two assessments was favourable, this group of habitats are threatened by a large number of pressures, particularly linked to development, but also indirectly from rising sea levels and coastal engineering.

Grasslands are generally dependent on appropriate management, most often linked to agriculture – see section "Habitats associated with agriculture are particularly in need of conservation action" (page 7) for more detail.

Bogs, mires and fens have the largest proportion of assessments as 'unfavourable-bad' of any habitat group. Wetlands in general have long been recognised as under pressure, and have been the focus of worldwide attention through the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (<http://www.ramsar.org/>).

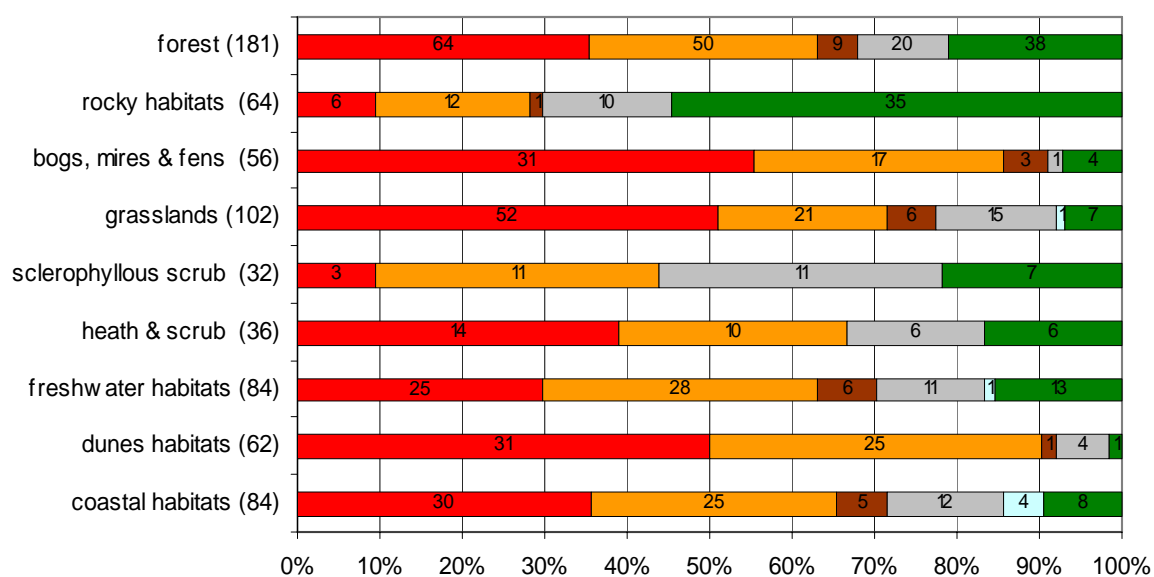


Figure 5 - Assessment of conservation status of habitats by habitat group (the number in brackets indicates the number of assessments in each group).

This is discussed in more detail in the report 'OVERVIEW OF CONSERVATION STATUS'.

Habitats associated with agriculture are particularly in need of conservation action

Habitats which are dependent on agriculture for their continuation have been identified and are clearly in a less favourable condition than Annex I habitats in general (see Figure 6). There is a regional gradient which strongly suggests a link with intensive agriculture. Similar trends have been reported within Germany⁴.

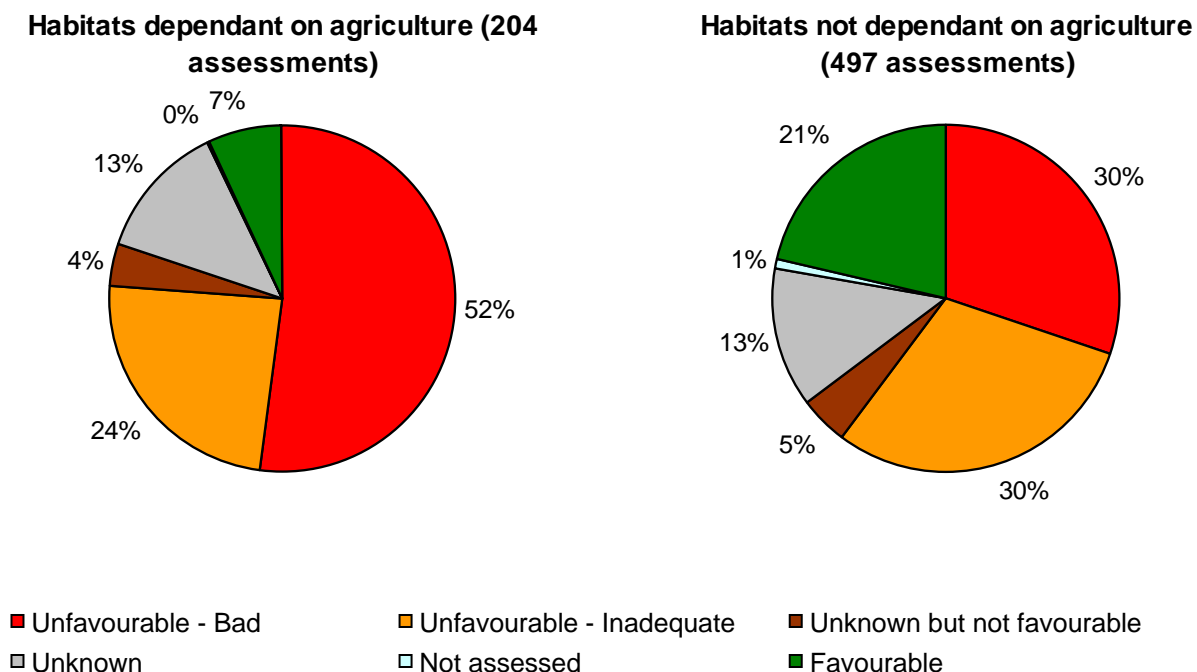


Figure 6 - Conservation status of habitats dependent (left) or not dependent (right) on agriculture.

See report 'SOME SPECIFIC ANALYSIS' for further information.

⁴ Schröder E, Ssymank A, Vischer-Leopold M, Ersfeld M (2008). Die Umsetzung der FFH-Richtlinie in der Agrarlandschaft. Umweltwissenschaften und Schadstoff-Forschung. Oct 1;20(4):264-274

Wetlands and dunes may already be affected by climate change

Although climate change was not included as such in the list of possible threats and pressures for the 2001-2006 report, Member States were asked to give major reasons for any reported trends in range, area and population. Climate change was one of the suggested options and was indicated as a reason for 42 habitats (19%) and 144 species (12%). Climate change was mentioned for 50% of wetland habitat assessments and almost 30% of dune assessments.

Amongst the species groups, amphibians were noted more than any other group (45%), followed by arthropods (29%).

See report 'SOME SPECIFIC ANALYSIS' for further information.

A large number of unknowns, especially in southern Europe

A large number of habitats and particularly species were reported as 'unknown' by one or more Member States which has often led to regional assessments as 'unknown'. This is particularly true for countries in southern Europe with Cyprus, Greece, Spain and Portugal all reporting 'unknown' for more than 50% of their species reports (see Figure 3).

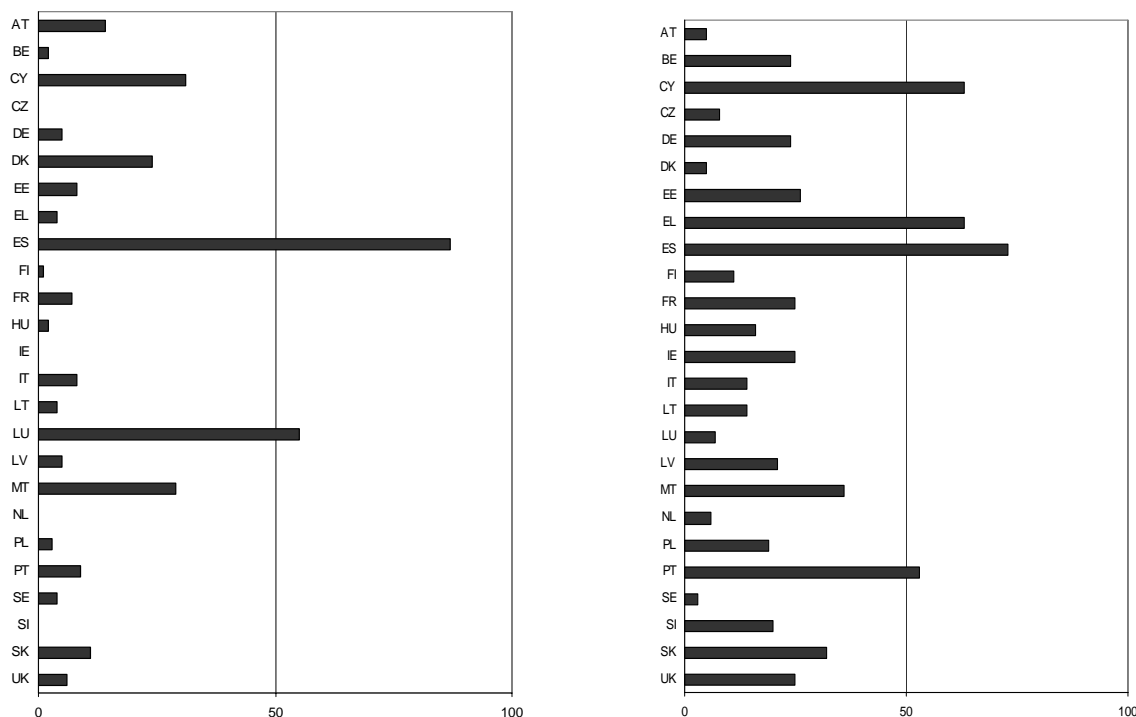


Figure 6 - Percentage of reports assessed as 'unknown' for each Member State for habitats (left) and species (right)

In both Spain and Portugal a large number of assessments are 'unknown' as a result of administrative problems in coordinating the reporting process rather than an absence of scientific information. However it is not clear if the high number of assessments and parameters with no information in *e.g.* Cyprus, Greece and Italy reflect similar problems or a real absence of knowledge.

Even in northern Europe, many individual parameters remain unknown showing the need for further monitoring and in some cases research. This is particularly true for marine habitats and species (see below).

See report 'DATA COMPLETENESS QUALITY & COHERENCE' for further detail

Better coordination between the Member States is required

The reporting format was designed to allow the use of data collected for other purposes, often over differing time periods and using a variety of techniques. It was also designed to work with a wide range of habitats and species.

Although explanatory notes and guidelines were prepared it is clear that there has been variation in how they have been interpreted by the Member States (and possibly by regional authorities or agencies). These variations may have led to variations in how a given habitat or species has been assessed or have influenced regional assessments if the parameter used for weighting has been estimated very differently in the Member States involved.

This has been recognised as a problem for some time and work is already underway to both improve the reporting format itself and the associated guidelines.

See 'DATA COMPLETENESS QUALITY & COHERENCE' for further detail

Better knowledge is required for the Marine Environment

Although there are only 6 habitats and 54 species which are marine (*i.e.* found in the oceans and seas around Europe) it is clear that few of them are well known and almost 70% of assessments for the 4 marine regions were either 'unknown' or not possible due to missing information. The unknowns are particularly frequent amongst the Annex IV cetaceans.

Full list of reports prepared by the ETC/BD

Further information is available in the following reports prepared by the ETC/BD

- a_An overview of Article 17 reporting
- b_Habitats and species covered by the Art 17 report
- c_Data completeness quality & coherence
- d_Introduction to the MS assessments
- e_Checklists Explanatory Note.pdf
- f_Consultation Notes
- f_Consultation statistics
- g_Introduction to Biogeographical assessments
- h_Overview of biogeographical assessments
- i_Overview of conservation status
- j_Some specific analysis
- k_Measures for strict protection regime
- l_Control systems for incidental killing
- m_Taking and exploitation Annex V species

The assessments are available from the Article 17 Webtool (<http://biodiversity.eionet.europa.eu/article17>).
