

A Methodology to Assess Impacts of Plans and Programmes on the Network Function of Natura 2000

Johan Lammerant (j.lammerant@arcadisbelgium.be)

ARCADIS Belgium, Kortrijksesteenweg 302, 9000 Gent, Belgium

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The Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive offer the legal European framework to establish and manage the Natura 2000 network. The key obligation under the Natura 2000 network is to provide the necessary conservation measures to maintain and restore favourable conservation status for a number of protected species and habitats.

At all institutional levels governments are launching plans and programmes to promote the development of transport, communications, energy, tourism, etc. . Many of these plans are in a direct or indirect way potentially affecting Natura 2000 sites.

According to the SEA Directive the environmental impacts of these plans have to be investigated and mitigating measures have to be proposed. According to Art 6(3) of the Habitat Directive a so called Appropriate Assessment has to be executed to investigate if nature conservation objectives in the potentially affected Natura 2000 sites could be harmed. In almost all cases the above assessments are carried out at site level but not at the level of the network. As a result impacts on network coherence are often overlooked.

ARCADIS developed a practical methodology to allow authorities to assess the impacts of major plans and programmes on the coherence of the Natura 2000 network and thereby to minimize the impact on the network in an early stage. The methodology is based on the generally applied 'good practices' for performing appropriate assessments and SEA, but has a specific focus on network impacts.

The methodology contains a number of practical tools to deal with complex issues as:

- Defining functional ecological networks
- How to deal with network coherence in the SEA screening phase?
- Role of network coherence in achieving/maintaining conservation goals at site level
- Criteria to allow significance evaluation at the level of impacts on network integrity