

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

Green Party
for the South East of England

Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner
DG External Relations
The European Commission
200 Rue de la Loi
B1049 Brussels
Belgium

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Dear Commissioner,

In 2006 the South Korean authorities made a disastrous decision to drain the site of the biologically diverse Saemangeum Wetland. According to one of my constituents who is familiar with the site, the tidal range of the 155 square mile wetland has dropped from seven metres to just seventeen centimetres and all but 30 of the 400 boats that fished estuary waters have been grounded as a result of the closure of a 33 mile seawall.

The impact on bird and other wildlife has been dramatic. Saemangeum is the region's most important refuelling post for around 400,000 migrating waders and at the height of migration over 150,000 waders, representing more than 25 species, seek food there in a single day. Yet the draining of the wetland threatens their very survival, and that of shellfish, plants and fish. These birds, which include large numbers of great knot, may well be too weak to make the final stage of their 15,000 mile round trip between the Southern hemisphere and south east Asia to breeding sites in Alaska and Russia, if they cannot feed sufficiently at Saemangeum. The spoon billed sandpiper and Nordmann's greenshank also rely on the tidal flats of the Yellow Sea, and Saemangeum in particular, for their survival.

The construction of the sea wall was fiercely opposed by conservationists in South Korea and has also devastated the lives of 25,000 people from fishing communities on the Yellow Sea coast. Yet it was justified in the name of creating paddy fields. Now, the authorities have discovered that there is insufficient water for irrigation to make the paddy fields viable, so are intending instead to develop the estuary. Proposals under discussion for the site include a casino, a golf course and a Formula One race track.

I understand that the sea wall at Saemangeum was designed with sluice gates, which, if opened, would allow for at least part of the wetland to be saved. I am urging the Commission to do its utmost to place pressure on the South Korean government and call for some of the wetland to be reflooded. The authorities have a unique opportunity to reverse in part their disastrous decision and with EU support may well be encouraged to do so. The ecological benefits of such a move would be considerable and I trust you will give this your immediate attention.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.