

P-2945/06EN

Answer given by Mr Dimas  
on behalf of the Commission  
(17.7.2006)

It is part of the Community policy to achieve a high level of health and environmental protection, and one of the objectives to be pursued is protection against ambient noise. In the Green paper on Future Noise Policy<sup>1</sup>, the Commission highlighted ambient noise as one of the main environmental problems in Europe.

A key step forward has been the adoption of the ambient noise Directive<sup>2</sup>. This requires competent bodies in the Member states to draw up ambient noise maps and action plans with a view to - amongst other things - preserving ambient noise quality where it is good and protecting quiet areas in agglomerations against an increase in noise.

The first noise maps and action plans are due respectively by 30 June 2007 and 18 July 2008. They will be reviewed by the Commission which will assess the need for further Community action on several aspects such as the protection of quiet areas in open country.

With regard to nature protection, the Wild Birds Directive<sup>3</sup> and the Habitats Directive<sup>4</sup> require that an ecological network called Natura 2000 is set up, consisting of special protection areas (SPAs) under the Wild Birds Directive, and sites of Community importance (SCIs) under the Habitats Directive. This network is aimed at protecting habitats and species of animals and plants of Community importance.

According to Article 6, paragraph 4 of the Habitats Directive, a project or plan that will adversely affect a special area of conservation can only be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest and in the absence of alternative solutions.

While the Member States have to ensure that the necessary measures are taken to maintain or enhance the conservation status of the species and habitats for which the Natura 2000 site was established, the designation of the Natura 2000 sites does not exclude economic management within such sites. The Commission has developed guidelines<sup>5</sup> to help national and regional administration in ensuring that appropriate assessment of plans and projects on Natura 2000 sites is undertaken.

It is therefore for individual Member States to make decisions in relation to undertaking economic activities that can affect Natura 2000 sites while respecting their Community obligations.

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<sup>1</sup> COM(96)540 final.

<sup>2</sup> Directive 2002/49/EC of the Parliament and of the Council of 25 June relating to assessment and management of environmental noise, OJ L 189, 18.7.2002

<sup>3</sup> Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds, OJ L 103, 25.4.1979, as last amended by Commission Directive 91/244/EEC of 6 March 1991, OJ L 115, 8.5.1991.

<sup>4</sup> Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, OJ L 206, 22.7.1992.

<sup>5</sup> See:

[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/nature\\_conservation/eu\\_nature\\_legislation/specific\\_articles/art6/pdf/natura\\_2000\\_assess\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/nature_conservation/eu_nature_legislation/specific_articles/art6/pdf/natura_2000_assess_en.pdf)

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