

MEETING REPORT FOR THE NWWRAC

Bio geographic seminar Atlantic,

Organised by the EC (DG ENVIRONMENT)

Galway 23-25 March 2009

Rapporteurs: Konstantinos Kalamantis / Lorcan O'Cinnéide

Attendance: EC, European Topic Center on Biological Diversity (on behalf of the European Environmental Agency), EU MS, NGOs, RACs.

Objective: to examine the sufficiency of representation of the proposed by EU Member States marine *habitats* and *species* needed of protection under Natura 2000.

Context: EU policy for marine biodiversity, including protected areas, is developing in the context of commitments at global, EU and regional levels. At the EU level, EU Heads of States and Governments have made a commitment 'to halt the loss of biodiversity in the EU by 2010.

The EU Environmental Action Plan identifies biodiversity as one of the priority themes for action and Natura 2000 is one of the key measures to achieve halt of biodiversity.

Preparation of the seminar:

Bio-geographical seminars have been used in the past for terrestrial areas needed of protection. The Galway seminar was the 1st one for marine sites.

Member States were given guidance, including a list of potential Natura 2000 marine habitat and species types, by the Commission (Guidelines: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/marine/index_en.htm)

Some examples of habitat types were sandbanks, Posidonia beds, reefs, submarine structures made by leaking gases and caves. Examples of species types were marine mammals (i.e. seals) and marine reptiles (i.e. sea turtles).

Outcome of the seminar:

Although the submission of sites was not as timely as the Commission would have wished, the process was nevertheless encouraging. The Commission thought it was time to hold technical discussions in order to verify whether designations that have been proposed or are underway were in line with the Habitats' Directive requirements.

The discussions were purely technical and didn't include proposed management plans for designated areas, as this would be the following step.

Examination was done on a case by case basis for habitats and species by each country presenting the work done at national level.

Appreciation of the European Topic Center: The ETC/BD had prepared evaluations of the national proposals for the species and habitats discussed at Galway. According to these evaluations, the proposed sites did not correspond to sites really needed of protection, as Germany had proposed much more sites (60 per cent of their waters) than UK, whose EEZ is much bigger than the German one.

This was confirmed during the discussion, where it was considered that several Member States had to work further in order to identify sites to be protected under Natura 2000 to comply with the objectives of the Habitats' Directive.

RACs representatives' appreciation: RACs representatives didn't feel that they could actively contribute at this stage, as the very complex technical discussions were the presentation of the outcome of discussions already taken place at national level at each of the Members States concerned. If RACs' members had not been involved in these discussions, some NGOs had done extensive work and had their say in the final judgement on whether work done was sufficient or not.

This created some worries to representatives from the fishing industry, who felt that they had missed already an important phase of the consultation process.

However the role of RACs was clarified: RACs were one of the *fora* where implementation of fisheries management measures under Natura 2000 would be discussed. The issue of management of the sites would be discussed once these sites were formally designed, the aim of this bio-geographic seminar being simply to examine whether the criteria provided for in the habitats' Directive were met.

Next steps: the delegates were expected to make comments by 10 April, then the European Topic Center would finalise the conclusions and the Commission would transmit them officially to the Member States who would have to indicate how they were going to fill the various gaps.

The next seminar would be for the Baltic marine region in autumn 2009.

Sites of Community Importance (SCIs) to be designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) should be identified by the Commission (in the framework of the bio-geographical regions and in agreement with Member States) on the basis of the National Lists proposed by Member States. Together these agreed sites would constitute the Community List provided for in the Habitat Directive.

The overall aim of the Commission was to have decisions adopted by 2010 to present to the CBD process.

Conclusions of NWWRAC representatives attending

The direct relevance of this meeting to NWWRAC was limited, insofar as the principal purpose was for DG Environment to assess whether EU Atlantic Area countries have designated sufficient marine areas for conservation. The discussion was largely scientific and generally consisted of Environmental NGOs challenging national governments on the scale of designation. NGOs were very well organised.

There was no discussion of the management issues raised by designation, which will of course be critical.

A NWWRAC representative raised the issue of the need to consider designation in the context of management i.e. that decisions on designation should not be divorced from the possible management implications. This was deemed to be beyond the scope of the seminar.