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Member of the European Commission  
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Vienna, 19 November 2015

## Re: Austrian Environment NGOs stand up for the EU Birds and Habitats Directives

Dear Commissioner Vella,

**more than a half million EU citizens** participated in this year's public consultation on the Fitness Check of the EU Nature Directives. They sent you this powerful message that we highly value the EU's nature protection laws.

Furthermore, **ten member states** so far have signed the **letter** of Germany's Federal Environment Minister Ms Hendricks to state their opinion **against the amendment of the Nature Directives** to avoid the logical consequences: new legal uncertainty and the need for personnel and financial resources, which would no longer be available for implementing the conservation directives.

**Austrian eNGOs fully support this view, in particular as Austria's Federal Environment Minister Mr Rupprechter did not sign this letter so far.**

For federally organised countries like Austria, the role of the EU is crucial. The Birds and Habitats Directives ensure that Austria meets international nature protection obligations and they also set coherent and high quality standards in nature protection for all nine Austrian regions equally.

To improve nature conservation in Europe and to ensure the achievement of the EU 2020 target – halting the loss of biodiversity – we urge you to focus your efforts on:

- Ensuring that the **EU nature legislation is fully and effectively implemented,**
- **Reforming environmentally harmful subsidies** under EU sectoral policies that drive biodiversity loss,
- **Increasing investment in Europe's natural capital,** e.g. via LIFE and sectoral funds and
- Ensuring **transparency and public participation.**

In fact, the EU Nature Directives contribute to people's wellbeing and are essential tools for meeting the EU biodiversity targets by 2020. Without them, Europe's nature would be in a far worse state. The Commission's recent *State of Nature*<sup>1</sup> assessment and *Donald et al.* study on performance of EU nature legislation in protecting target bird species<sup>2</sup> show that where the Directives are fully implemented, conservation successes have been achieved. Austria, however, is the last (!) EU member country that falls behind on entirely fulfilling the EU Nature directives' obligations on the designation of Natura 2000 sites. Opening up the directives would affect Austria's natural heritage even worse, due to a expectable further delay of concrete and effective implementation measures.

Despite the efforts so far, the previous results of the midterm review of the biodiversity strategy 2020 are alarming and show that the EU is far from halfway meeting the 2020 biodiversity targets.

**Therefore strengthened implementation – especially site management and sufficient financing – as well as a sufficient designation of Natura 2000-sites remain the highest priorities.**

On November 20<sup>th</sup> Austrian eNGOs will strongly be represented at the Fitness Check Conference in Brussels, stand up for the EU Nature Directives and send a strong signal to you and Europe!

<sup>1</sup> EC (2015) *Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: The State of Nature in the European Union, Report on the Status and Trends of Habitat Types and Species covered by the Birds and Habitats Directives for the period 2007-2012 as required under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive and Article 12 of the Birds Directive* (COM(2015)219 final).

<sup>2</sup> Donald et al. (2015) *Assessing the performance of EU nature legislation in protecting target bird species in an era of climate change* (DOI: 10.1111/conl.12196), available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/conl.12196/abstract>.

Yours sincerely,



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*Gerald Pfiffinger*

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