



Wildlife and
Countryside



News Release

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Don't undermine the laws that protect nature, say nearly half a million European citizens

Calls to defend nature beat the record for responses to European public consultations

Don't undermine or wreck the laws protecting nature. That's the clear and powerful message to the President of the European Commission and his Commissioners from the majority of nearly half a million people [note 6] across Europe (with around one in five of those coming from the [four UK countries](#)) who have so far responded to the consultation on the future of two of Europe's nature laws: the Birds and Habitats Directives.

As the three-month consultation draws to a close at midnight tonight [Friday 24 July, 2015], conservation and wildlife groups across Europe are delighted with the level of public support which has exceeded all previous consultations on any other European law.

In Europe, four environmental networks, comprising WWF Europe, BirdLife International, the European Environmental Bureau and Friends of the Earth Europe, came together in May launching the Nature Alert campaign [note 2] in response to the EU Commission's suggestion to evaluate whether the existing EU nature laws should be changed.

In the UK, 100 organisations came together under the Joint Links [note 1] umbrella: Scottish Environment Link, Wildlife and Countryside Link, Northern Ireland Environment Link and Wales Environment Link to collect and submit evidence in support of these vital laws.

Geneviève Pons, Director of WWF European Policy Office said on behalf of the Nature Alert NGO coalition: “At a time when the European Union is severely tested, the overwhelming support from all corners of the continent for Europe’s nature laws demonstrates that people can get together and defend what really matters to them. Europeans care about their nature, and the Union’s laws that protect it. Now, it is time for the Commission to listen to the evidence and draw up a plan for nature protection based on more funding and stronger law enforcement.”

Deborah Long, Chair of the Wildlife Forum at Scottish Environment LINK, said: “We know how important wildlife is to Scottish history, culture and national wellbeing. Now people right across Europe have sent a clear message that the laws protecting the continent’s wildlife must not be weakened or compromised. It is a staggering public response. Scottish wildlife groups are playing key roles in campaigning for the protection and proper implementation of these pivotal laws, and Europe’s citizens have heeded the collective call. The European Commission must listen to what the public has said.”

Chair of the Joint Links’ Habitats and Birds group Kate Jennings, (RSPB), said: “The Birds Directive and its younger sibling – the Habitat’s Directive - have been protecting Europe’s wildlife for over 30 years. Wherever you travel in the United Kingdom or elsewhere in the European Union, from the Flow Country in Scotland to the coastal wetland of southern Spain and from seabird colonies in Ireland to the last remnant of wildwood in eastern Poland, you’re never far from a site that has been protected as a result of these laws.

“We were appalled at hearing the news that the Nature Directives were under threat of being weakened by those who fear that these laws may be a block on economic growth. The evidence debunks this myth and we’re delighted that hundreds of thousands of European people share our concerns. We now need the European Commission to listen.”

The concerns from conservation groups have been mirrored by many in the business sector. Kate Jennings added: “Nature is in crisis. Any change to the laws could spell uncertainty, and potentially add costs, for business. Many industries from ports and shipping to major renewable energy producers on land and at sea have developed ways of working effectively with these laws to ensure developments do not cause unacceptable damage to nature. Changes now would undermine the good practice that has been developed over the years.”

The Joint Links group’s response to the EC consultation sets out a huge volume of evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of the Directives in protecting nature, providing huge benefits for people and providing a stable framework for responsible businesses. [To obtain the Joint Links evidence please see note 5].

To register your views on the future of the Birds and Habitats Directives, please visit:

www.naturealert.eu

ENDS

For further information and to arrange an interview, please contact:

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Alison Kirkman, **Woodland Trust** (alisonkirkman@woodlandtrust.org.uk or 07767 213792) to arrange an interview with Woodland Trust Conservation Director, Austin Brady.

Images:

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Notes to editors:

1. Joint Links collectively represents voluntary organisations with more than eight million supporters across the UK. It comprises the combined memberships of [Scottish Environment Link](#), [Wildlife and Countryside Link](#), [Wales Environment Link](#) and the [Northern Ireland Environment Link](#). Each is a coalition of environmental voluntary organisations, united by their common interest in the conservation and restoration of nature and the promotion of sustainable development across the terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments.
2. The 'Nature Alert' tool was developed by a coalition of Europe-wide voluntary organisations (BirdLife Europe; European Environmental Bureau; Friends of the Earth Europe; and WWF Europe). The tool is being made available to citizens of 28 European countries and has been translated into 20 languages.
3. On 30 April the European Commission launched its public consultation on the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive.
4. In May, 100 voluntary organisations across the UK – known as the 'Joint Links Group' – cited that the European Commission's REFIT 'Fitness Check' of the Birds and Habitats Directives is the biggest single threat to UK and European nature and biodiversity in a generation.
5. To access the evidence submitted by the Joint Links group, please click here: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/fitness_check/evidence_gathering/index_en.htm
6. At 11am on Thursday 23 July, the number of people responding to the consultation reached over 470,000, with over 94,000 of those coming from the UK with over 36 hours to go.