



MINISTER-PRESIDENT

H.E. Mr José Manuel Barroso
President of the European Commission

No.: 3080107

The Hague, 13 July 2009

Dear José Manuel,

Please find enclosed some further information on our concerns regarding Natura 2000, which I mentioned during our conversation of 11 June 2009.

I found our meeting highly enjoyable and most productive. I look forward to the prospect of continuing our cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Jan Peter Balkenende
Prime Minister of the Kingdom
of the Netherlands

Dutch position paper on Natura 2000

The Netherlands sets great store by and actively pursues the conservation and development of ecological value in the EU. The European Natura 2000 network plays an important role. However, Natura 2000 fails to strike a balance between ecological value, economic interests and other uses. This is due mainly to the wording of the precautionary principle. The Netherlands believes the Directives that form the basis of Natura 2000 need to be brought up to date in order to strike this balance. The aim should always be sustainable use. A number of recent directives, such as the Water Framework Directive, demonstrate that this is possible.

- 1) The strict ecological focus of Natura 2000, which is due mainly to the wording of the precautionary principle, means that in some regions – on land as well as water – entrepreneurs are at risk of losing their livelihoods, even though the activities they engage in are centuries old. In the Netherlands, nature conservation and economic activity have always coexisted. In fact, we owe our natural diversity in part to this combination and have always sought a balance between economic and natural development at regional level. Natura 2000 threatens to put an end to this practice.
- 2) As a result, there is diminishing public support for nature and biodiversity policy in the Netherlands. Where biodiversity conservation and restoration are concerned, Natura 2000 therefore overshoots the mark.
- 3) Natura 2000 should offer member states more scope for a dynamic approach to achieving the objectives. Climate change is altering the habitats and species to be found in each region. It is therefore impossible to apply static objectives to conservation. In addition, nature development offers opportunities for dealing with climate change.
- 4) The precautionary principle is not formulated in the same way as it is formulated and applied in international frameworks such as the Convention on Biological Diversity. It would be better if the EU formulated the precautionary principle in line with the international frameworks.
- 5) The Netherlands believes it is time to bring up to date the relatively old directives which form the basis of Natura 2000, the Birds Directive, which dates from 1979, and the 1992 Habitats Directive. The evaluation should take account of the increasingly topical need to strike a balance between ecological interests and economic and human interests, and to address the impact of climate change on our living environment.
- 6) The Dutch government asks the European Commission to draft proposals to bring these Directives up to date.