

European Habitats Forum meetings

Internal meeting: 23rd October 2008: IUCN Offices, Brussels

Meeting with Patrick Murphy, Head of Biodiversity Unit at DG Environment: 24th October 2008: DG Environment, Brussels (text inserted below)

Note of meeting for SEH : Tony Gent

1. Introductory sections: Due to the large agenda the 'tour de table' where we receive updates from member organisations was deleted from the agenda. Invoices for subscriptions for membership of EHF for 2008 are due to be sent out to member organisations.

2. Future role of European Habitats Forum: a key topic revolved around the future direction of EHF and its role. It was noted that the European Commission (EC) encouraged the formation of EHF to provide a focus for the development and initial implementation of the Habitats Directive as a simple point of contact with environmental NGOs. Recently it appears that the EC is becoming less interested in working with EHF – preferring instead to work with the larger NGOs (such as Birdlife/ EEB/ WWF). We asked the question whether there is now less of a role for NGOs at a European level now that much of the implementation work for the Directives is at the Member State level. There was some discussion on the degree to which EHF should move from its 'core competency' of working on the Directives to include wider range of environmental/ biodiversity issues – interestingly there was split in views with the smaller NGOs seeming to want EHF to look at a broader range of issues (e.g. wider landscape policy) while the larger NGOs tended to want to stay focused on the Directives. It is likely that this reflects the fact that the larger NGOs also work through other groups/ forums where as the smaller ones tend to consider EHF our main point of contact with the EC. We should also note the core skills of people on the EHF group: many are policy specialists; notably absent are skills, e.g. in marine conservation. There was some discussion about working with other groups to broaden the skills base or to use other representatives from within the networks.

It was agreed that we all wanted to see EHF continue and that it should aim to represent "the conservation community of Europe" with it being able to reach into all corners of Europe through its membership. The focus for EHF should be on 'Biodiversity conservation'. It should aim to provide a main point of NGO contact for the EC and a single point of contact for the EC to communicate with many NGOs.

Although there is a large membership there is a limited capacity for the network in Brussels, and so much falls to the Brussels based staff of the larger NGOs (Birdlife/ EEB/ WWF/ IUCN) and to the EHF secretariat. There was some discussion over the role of a 'core group' within EHF of Brussels based policy experts – and when they should aim to represent EHF and when they should represent their member organisations or specific coalitions of NGOs outside of EHF. There is a key issue with CONFIDENTIALITY as the EHF membership is very wide and some of the member networks (notably IUCN and Eurosite) have Governmental members. Obviously there are some policy issues discussed by NGOs, between themselves or with the European Commission, that are not appropriate to share with Governmental bodies. In such cases some NGOs are reluctant to involve the wider Forum; in other cases the representatives for the different networks need to avoid sharing this confidential information with their networks – which could prove difficult.

It was agreed that the 'core Brussels based' policy staff would make a judgement how they operated on different issues:

- (a) Where a particular approach or action can be agreed amongst EHF members then they should aim to represent EHF
- (b) Where EHF do not agree, but that presenting a range of views can be useful, then the representatives can offer these views as a range of options
- (c) Where agreement is difficult, or where confidentiality may be compromised by involving all EHF members then individual groups or small 'coalitions' of like minded organisations would work on particular issues.

It was also agreed that the EHF secretariat would be part of this core group to try to maximise the opportunities for EHF representation.

3. EHF secretariat & management: after some discussion, in which both Eurosite and IUCN offered to host the secretariat of EHF, a vote was held. Eurosite were selected as the secretariat for the next few years (by 6 votes to 5!).

It was agreed that a second Vice Chair should be elected – this to be done at the next meeting: so people were invited to make nominations for this role. The current Chairman and Vice Chairman are also to stand down, and offer themselves for re-election if they wish. It is likely that the current Chairman (Zoltan Waliczky, Birdlife) will not stand for re-election.

We were advised that during that afternoon there was a meeting of the EC with NGOs talking about funding for NGOs for 2009: a new round of funding is about to be made available. Information is available on DG Environment website under 'Funding'. See:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ngos/index_en.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/funding/intro_en.htm see under 'Grants'

One of the themes is funding NGOs looking to fund around 30 proposals for a total budget of € 8.750.000. There is a closing date of 'November/December 2008: **SEH Conservation Committee should consider whether this is something that we should aim to apply for this year!**

4. Natura 2000 site designation in Romania & Bulgaria: the representative of CEEWEB said that she was looking for support and input about Natura 2000 site designation in Romania and Bulgaria: with the designation covering some 50 species and 30 habitats. Further details will be circulated via e-mail. I will forward these onto SEH CC members who wish to be involved. I do not know the degree to which the habitats/ species are important for herpetofauna. Deadline for comments September 2009. **Please let me know if you are interested in receiving further information once I receive this.**

5. EHF Strategy and work priorities: A draft strategy was circulated which aimed to provide a framework for deciding on the key activities that the forum members wished to take forward together as EHF. Some ideas were provided for expanding this, notably increasing reference to 'involving people' and 'people benefits' (e.g. health & ecosystems services) and developing a 'long term vision'. A workshop followed where everybody identified 3-4 specific issues that they felt should be taken forward under EHF: these grouped under 4 themes.

- Lobbying
- Post 2010 vision

- Evidence/ information gathering
- Communication.

The three key actions suggested for EHF collectively were:

- (i) Lobbying European Parliament & especially new MEPs to support the Nature Directives: providing simple messages (e.g. importance of Natura 2000, perhaps with visits to key Natura 2000 sites): likely to require a Country level focus.
- (ii) Post 2010 Vision (Group established)
- (iii) Developing & promoting Key Principles/messages for conservation for taking forward through EHF (Sue Collins, Butterfly Conservation, to lead on this and establish a working group).

Suggested that during next meeting significant time should be dedicated to discussing some of these key issues

EHF Members were asked to consider c.3 key activities/ issues that they will take forward in their networks that take forward items of the EHF Strategy. These to be fed back to the EHF Secretariat. SEH CC is therefore asked to consider what key actions it wishes to pursue to promote the EHF Strategy **A copy of the strategy is also circulated with this note for ease of reference. Please let me know what activities you feel we should be taking forward through EHF: examples *could* include:**

- Showing MEPs important herpetofauna areas
- Developing the IHA project and linking this to Natura 2000 evaluation: showing good examples of herpetofauna conservation through the Natura 2000 network
- Monitoring protocols, etc, for herpetofauna
- Promoting European level working through our network
- Developing ideas about FCS
- Promoting the Climate Change report and using this to develop ideas about climate change adaptations.

6. Items for discussion with Pat Murphy, Head of Biodiversity Unit at DG Environment (notes of meeting with Patrick Murphy on 24th October included in coloured font)

(a) BAP Mid term review: the EC Biodiversity Action Plan has some 150 items. This runs to 2010 and a review of progress is planned for 2008 'mid-term'. Proposal is that some of the larger NGOs will review and develop a press release. Also Birdlife has secured a Parliamentary motion looking to promote perhaps three key messages. The meeting with Pat Murphy will explore which messages are most valuable.

- The EC is committed to producing an annual report on progress 'mid-way' through the Action Plan period. Likely to be a 12 page summary, including an appraisal of progress/deficiencies at European (including progress by other DGs) and Member state level, now in its final stages of approval through the EC. There will also be a huge volume of annexes giving more detail
- DG Environment are hoping to produce a type of 'score board' so relative performance of DGs and MSs can be easily evaluated – but this may be politically difficult!
- Due out by end November/ early December

- Key message is that we are unlikely to meet 2010 target
- Next evaluation is due in 2010.
- Discussion re. Parliamentary Motion suggested that key points could include:
 - i. Assessment of integration of biodiversity into other policy areas. The traditional approach of keeping issues separate has meant that biodiversity conservation is not getting integrated well into areas such as Agriculture, Fisheries, Trade, Research & Development
 - ii. Finance: though use of structural & integration funds offers possibilities for biodiversity funding, it does not appear to be working as well as it could – there are some exceptions (e.g. agriculture funding in Sweden)
 - iii. Importance of Natura 2000 network: the real importance of the Directive comes after designation through ensuring effective management – this needs to be taken forward.
 - iv. NGOs should aim for a Resolution of Council to take the Motion forward in March 2009
- IUCN have an event in European Parliament on 10 December: details currently being worked out but will include 2 lines of activities:
 - i. BAP review: looking at progress on 2010 target, additional activities needed to help progress towards this, developing ideas to address problems that have been identified
 - ii. Post 2010 Activities: including looking at ecosystems service; Invasive Alien Species: Importance of Nature Directives
- The Commission will be changing half way through 2009, with new Commissioners and so the EC is unlikely to wish to make commitments to influence the next Commissioner's scope for developing his/her own policy direction.

(b) Article 17 reports: query about a press release that indicated Natura 2000 doesn't work! Ask about composite reports and explore opportunities for greater NGO involvement and influence in future

- Press release sent out by European Environment Agency: was deemed unhelpful by EC and by colleagues at EEA – it wasn't initiated by the EC nor does it reflect their views.
- It is hard to assess the change in status of biodiversity – though indications are of continued declines.
- SEBI 2010 indicators are based on existing schemes/ information readily available – but very few feed off the Article 17 reporting
- Carlos Ramao at the European Topic Centre is looking to aggregate Article 17 information to look at species information/ habitats information across the range to get indications of where issues are (e.g. state of populations of forest species, etc).
- Article 17 report should be available in first 4 months of 2009
- Article 17 allows reporting at European and Member State level: therefore important to use national networks to make assessments
- The reports were driven by Member States & EC said it was imperative that they were responsible for them, as these are an Obligation and important that MSs are accountable for them. NGO driven reports would not have the same impact.

- The consultation round was discussed: offered limited scope for major comments, however several hundred comments were received – mostly specific and offering high quality information.
- NGOs are encouraged to work with these reports and aim is to encourage greater working between Governments and NGOs
- Communication on the Article 17 reports should be available in June 2009

SEH should consider how to take this reporting work forward: perhaps by looking at setting pan-European 'standards' but specifically developing constructive working relationships with MS Governments, i.e. at 'country level.

(c) "Green structure of Europe" : find out what this project is all about

- The EC have identified that there are many ideas and initiatives – many of which 'overlap', such as ecosystems services, climate change adaptation, Article 10 'corridors'
- Keen to see these ideas drawn together
- Wishes to establish a 'platform' for exchanging views and ideas
- Aims to hold conference in March 2009 to invite input and exchange of ideas
- Project being coordinated by Marco Fritz: e-mail: marco.fritz@ec.europa.eu : he has invited comments and contributions.

Does this interest anyone in SEH? Anyone want to lead on this?

(d) Financing Natura 2000: try to find out about how much money is being spent: in particular is the 'integration of funding streams, rather than a dedicated Natura 2000 funding stream, working?

- We had a short presentation on the funding programme period 2007-2013
- During this period there is no dedicated funding stream for Natura 2000, rather existing instruments should be used: Social & Economic Cohesion Funds, CAP, Common Fisheries and LIFE+
- Not all funds are applicable to all MSs.
- Funding is provided to support programmes set by MS; Community Strategic Guidance for funding for nature conservation was very weak.
- Environmental and Biodiversity funding is seen as complex: hard to define 'beneficiaries' and generally require a lot of comparatively small projects (compared to large scale infrastructure e.g. roads, factories): also need to link funding to management plans – frequently not written and possibly won't be for many years
- OVERALL EFFECT: poor uptake of funds for biodiversity/ Natura 2000 funding.
- Questionnaire survey being to Member States to find out spend on Natura 2000 – reply expected end March 2009
- Though there is an obligation for funding for Natura 2000 – arguably the Directive only requires this 6 years after site designation: as most sites designated less than six years ago, this provision doesn't 'bite' yet.

- (e) Marine Protected Areas: encourage completion of the marine SAC series as quickly as possible – with ‘biogeographic seminars’ being held as soon as possible
- Generally slow progress: though 7 MSs have identified marine sites, other have done nothing!
 - Some MSs have not even initiated surveys
 - Agreed this is becoming urgent, noting a previous agreement between the Commission and MSs that these sites should be designated by the end of 2008 –perhaps Parliamentary questions might help focus the mind!
 - Very keen to get at least first two biogeographic seminars happening in 2009
- (f) Bulgaria: this country is seen as being problematic, with very poor implementation of the Directives. It appears that the EC is giving mixed messages and seems to be ‘blocking’ action against Bulgaria – is this true?
- There is a general nervousness in Legal Services about progressing cases without strong evidence and very strong likelihood of winning: general preference for trying to deal with concerns/ complaints via an informal process (which works in many Member States)
 - Bulgaria is seen to be a particularly difficult case and does warrant strong action
 - Example of large wind farm being given permissions – and the difficulty position of EC in objecting to schemes with strong Member State support.
 - Important that NGOs/ Civil Society keep up pressure via well document complaints and also via contacts with MEPs, etc. as important that European Parliament appreciate that urgent action is needed to ensure that there is not an irreplaceable loss of some of Europe’s most important and biodiverse areas.
- (g) Miscellaneous items raised:
- Review of the Directives: this should not be taken as a ‘foregone conclusion’ – it is possible that this might not happen; though we should always consider a ‘contingency plan’ in case it does!
 - There is a challenge to the process of designation of Natura 2000 sites – there is a view that this process is contrary to Human Rights legislation
 - Carrion Feeding Birds: new waste disposal regulations ensuring hygienic disposal of carcasses is being proposed. There has been almost no reference to biodiversity impacts during the progress of this legislation. This will mean that dead animals will need to be removed and therefore have impact on carrion feeding birds & scavenging mammals (e.g. bears) – might this effect any other groups of animals? If this concerns you – contact an MEP!!
- (h) Next meeting:
- Aim to discuss some big topics:
- Article 17 results: text of communication should be being prepared by them
 - ‘Beyond 2010’: good point to start working on this; aim to get a mutually reinforce able message between Commission and NGOs.

7. Items for discussion with Jos Delbeke, Acting Secretary General of DG Environment. (Note: I did not attend this meeting and so cannot comment on the outcome)

- (a) BAP Communication Strategy: will the EC be preparing a BAP communication strategy? When? What format? What scope for NGO involvement? The current strategy is seen as a 'closed' and 'non-inclusive' strategy
 - (b) Monitoring of progress important: the SEBI 2010 (Stream-lining European Biodiversity Indicators 2010) use a variety of measures (e.g. woodland birds/ butterflies – but no 'herp measures'))provides the main indicators for assessing progress – but will it continue & how will it be funded?
 - (c) Post 2010 biodiversity policy: what is the process for developing this?
 - (d) Climate change & biodiversity: keen to see how this will be taken forward – noted that Delbeke has a climate change background.
- 8. Post 2010 Working Group:** EHF's working group has prepared a paper that has been used as the basis for various meetings and discussions, e.g. meeting with Mr Miko and even by the UK/ English Government for their own discussions and cited at the Countdown 2010 meeting in Bonn. We discussed where this needs to develop next:
- (a) It is an issue relevant to all EHF members
 - (b) Paper provides many ideas but we haven't agreed on a Goal
 - (c) Agreed that Alberto Arroyo (WWF) will prepare a final report of the work of this group and close down the working group
 - (d) Probably not appropriate for EHF to provide targets yet – but rather focus on a target
 - (e) Recognised that many people are working on this: suggested best chance of influence through Convention of Biological Diversity where parties and observers (which include members of EHF, such as Birdlife, IUCN & WWF) have been invited to submit ideas.
 - (f) A further opportunity is to submit ideas through the 'Biodiversity for Europe' meeting in February/March 2009.

NOTE: a key issue that we need to consider in SEH is representation at EHF and the level of information that should be circulated widely (or to SEH CC Members). EHF mentioned issues concerning CONFIDENTIALITY of information on a number of occasions and are worried about freely circulating information, such as Minutes of meetings, electronically in case they get spread too widely around networks. **I would welcome your thoughts on how widely we should send information within SEH and the Conservation Committee.**

Tony Gent
28th October 2008