

# Wind energy development and Natura 2000

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*New wind energy plans or projects in or near Natura 2000 sites are possible so long as they do not adversely affect the integrity of the site.*

## European Commission guidance

- Wind energy is a clean, renewable source of electricity whose contribution to the EU's total electricity production is set to grow significantly.
- As a result, the number of wind farm installations across the EU is likely to increase radically in the short to medium term. Some of these new sites may be located in or near areas of high nature value, such as Natura 2000 sites.
- To assist the wind farm developers and public authorities, the European Commission has published new guidance on how to devise wind energy plans and projects in line with the requirements of EU nature legislation.
- The guidance document seeks to promote a better understanding on how to avoid or minimise potential effects on Natura 2000 sites in particular, and how to carry out an Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive.
- The guidance document aims to give the economic operators and authorities concerned the clarity they require to ensure that the drive for further development, as promoted under the EU's 'Climate Change and Energy Package', is fully reconciled with the objectives of the EU nature Directives.

nature



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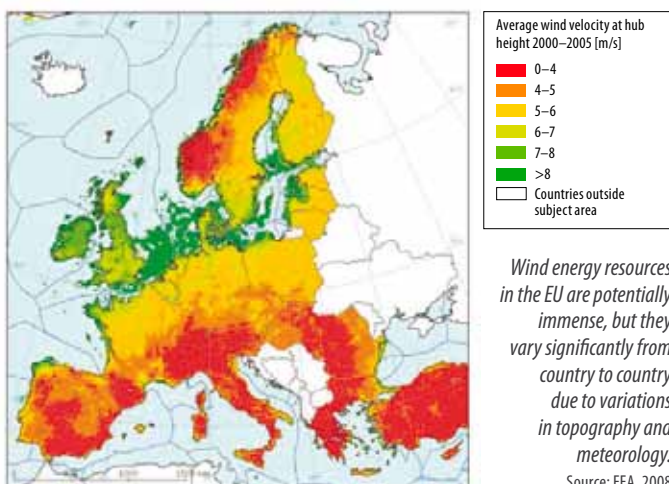


*Studies indicate that birds, especially raptors, can be particularly vulnerable to poorly sited wind farm developments.*

## Wind energy production in the EU

Wind energy in Europe has been growing rapidly over the last decade. In 2008, it accounted for around 4.8% of the EU's total electricity consumption.

In 2008, the EU adopted an ambitious 'Climate Change and Energy Package' which commits Member States to increase the share of renewable energy to 20% of Europe's total energy production by 2020. Wind energy is destined to make a significant contribution to achieving this target. Forecasts indicate that its production is expected to triple by 2020, leading to a significant increase in new wind farm developments over the coming years across the EU.



## Wind energy and wildlife

Wind energy brings many benefits to society, not least in reducing greenhouse gasses and air pollution. In general, wind energy developments do not represent a serious risk to wildlife, but poorly sited wind farms can pose a threat when they are located in or near areas of high ecological value, such as Natura 2000 sites.

The type and severity of the effects depends very much on the species and habitats present in the area as well as on the size, location and design of the wind farm development. Consequently, it is important to examine each project on a case-by-case basis.



*Marine mammals can be prone to significant disturbance from the construction of wind farms at sea.*

## Wind farm development and Natura 2000

Like all other land users, the wind energy sector must operate within the framework of EU environmental laws, which include both the Habitats and Birds Directives. The two Directives aim to conserve Europe's most valuable and endangered habitats. In particular, they require Member States to designate core areas for their conservation. These areas are known as Natura 2000 sites and form part of an EU-wide Natura 2000 Network.

Natura 2000 sites are not intended to be 'no development zones' and new developments are not automatically excluded. Instead, the Directives require that new plans or projects are undertaken in such a way that they do not adversely affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

### A step-by-step Commission guidance

Article 6 of the Habitats Directive lays down the procedure to be followed for authorising plans and projects that are likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site. This procedure is explained in detail in the European Commission's new guidance document.

Particular attention is paid to the need to base decisions on sound scientific information and expertise. Delays in the approval process can be caused by poor assessments that prevent the competent authorities from making clear judgements on the impacts of the plan or project.

As wind is in abundant supply throughout the EU, the new guidance document places strong emphasis on the need for strategic-level spatial planning. It recommends, in particular, that wildlife sensitivity maps are drawn up to identify areas within a region or municipality where wind farm developments might be considered a low, medium or high risk for wildlife and nature both within and outside Natura 2000 sites.

*In future, many EU wind farm developments will be located far out at sea.*



## Key messages from the guidance document



- **Strategic planning makes life easier for everyone**

Planning developments in a strategic manner over a broad geographical area is one of the most effective means of identifying potential conflicts and minimising the impacts on nature and wildlife early on in the planning process. It not only leads to a more integrated, transparent and stable development framework for industry, but also reduces the risk of difficulties for individual projects.

- **The Appropriate Assessments under Article 6 must be carried out correctly**

Experience has shown that many of the problems encountered during the permit approval process are caused by the fact that the necessary steps have not been followed correctly and the information gathered for the impact assessment is incomplete. This can lead to significant delays since the whole decision-making process has to be put on hold whilst the missing information is gathered.

- **Early consultation and dialogue with environmental experts is important**

Sound scientific research and early consultation with relevant stakeholders and experts right from the start of the project generally leads to a faster, smoother decision-making process. It also enables wind energy plans and projects to take account of nature conservation interests at the initial design stage so that solutions can be found that minimise or, where possible, avoid negative effects on Natura 2000 sites altogether.

[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/guidance\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/guidance_en.htm)

*Strategic planning for wind farm developments is very effective in helping to avoid potential conflict areas and minimising impacts on nature and wildlife.*



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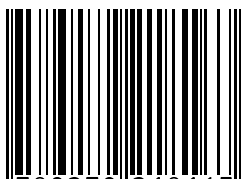
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