

EN
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Answer given by Mr Vella
on behalf of the European Commission
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The establishment and effective management of marine protected areas under the Natura 2000 network is a core objective of the Birds Directive 2009/147/EC¹ and the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC² and an essential element of the EU Biodiversity Strategy. While the establishment of the terrestrial component of the Natura 2000 network is largely complete, there are still important gaps for the marine environment, particularly offshore, requiring additional sites to be proposed by the Member States including Italy. The completion of the network at sea is also a specific priority action under the Commission's Action Plan for nature, people and the economy³.

The identification and selection of sites of Community importance, including those for the protection of wide ranging species such as dolphins and sea turtles, are done on the basis of provisions and scientific criteria set out in the Habitats Directive. The designation of sites of Community importance does not *per se* exclude the carrying out of economic activities in these sites provided that any significant negative impact on them is prevented.

The Commission is still discussing with the Italian authorities the insufficiencies of the Italian Natura 2000 network in order to fill the above mentioned gaps, namely for the marine environment.

The Commission is also promoting all international instruments to protect marine biodiversity, including for example those under the Barcelona Convention or the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean. These tools should however be used to complement and not to replace the requirements of the EU law.

¹ OJ L 020, 26.1.2010, p. 7.

² OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7.

³ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/fitness_check/action_plan/index_en.htm