



31.1.2015

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: Petition No 2359/2013 by Ernst Billeth (Austrian) on protection of wildlife from wind turbines

1. Summary of petition

The petitioner expresses concern at the projected construction of wind turbines 186 metres high in the 'Leiser Berge' protected natural wildlife park, which is covered by forests and is an area of outstanding beauty. Referring to EU environmental protection requirements including assessment of the visual impact of projects on the environment, he takes the view that the construction of wind turbines will undermine the quality of life and erode property prices in the area.

2. Admissibility

Declared admissible on 24 September 2014. Information requested from Commission under Rule 216(6).

3. Commission reply, received on 31 January 2015

The increased use of renewable energy is a major contributor to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and other negative environmental impacts linked to the use of fossil fuels. Nevertheless some forms of renewable energy bring their specific challenges in terms of avoiding negative environmental impacts.

Wind turbines for example can trigger concerns related to visual impact, noise levels as well as impact on wildlife and biodiversity. The EU has extensive environmental legislation in

place ensuring that such impacts are assessed as part of the planning and authorisation processes. New wind farm projects are usually subject to an environmental impact assessment (project level) whereas national or regional wind development plans will undergo a Strategic Environmental Assessment looking also at cumulative impacts. Moreover, if wind farms are likely to have an impact on Natura 2000 sites or protected species these need to be assessed specifically on the basis of the EU Habitats and Birds Directives. It should be noted that potential negative impacts of wind farms can be addressed through proper spatial planning and siting.

Conclusion

Location and construction of wind farms may be affected by European environmental legislation, such as the Birds and Habitats Directives, and the Directives on Strategic Environmental Assessment. Furthermore, environmental regulations and/or guidelines have been adopted in several Member States, mainly related to noise levels.

The Commission is of the opinion that it is possible to reconcile the development of wind farms with environmental policy objectives, including the need to protect biodiversity and habitats, in particular by identifying potential problems at an early stage and appropriate siting decisions. Any potential negative impacts of such projects should be analysed during the Impact Assessment procedure, which will also identify appropriate mitigation measures.