

**Question for written answer P-007826/2011
to the Commission
Rule 117
Philippe Lamberts (Verts/ALE)**

Subject: Implementation of the Natura 2000 network in the Walloon Region

Natura 2000 is central to nature conservation in the Walloon Region since the main tool in existence prior to the Natura 2000 network, namely natural reserve status in its broadest sense only covered 0.65 % of the region. Furthermore during the first assessment of heritage sites of Community interest in 2007, conducted both within and outside the Natura 2000 sites (in accordance with Article 17 of Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora), three quarters of the habitats and species of Community interest present in the Walloon Region were deemed to be in a poor state of conservation.

The Walloon Minister responsible for nature called a halt to the designation process for the 240 Natura 2000 sites in Wallonia because he noticed that zones had been altered during the mapping prior to sites being designated. According to figures being circulated, 5 000 hectares (ha) were withdrawn and 12 000 ha added, equating to +7 000 ha or 3 % of the current network. The justification given for the withdrawals was mistakes in selection and for the most part they comprise alterations to zones on the edges of the sites. The 12 000 ha added comprise 6 000 ha from alterations to boundary areas (offsetting the withdrawals) and 6 000 ha of 'new sites' that are of major biological interest and fully deserving of Natura 2000 site status. It seems that the owners of approximately half of the 6 000 ha added as new sites agreed to their integration into the network.

Bearing this information in mind, does the Commission consider that the alterations to zones proposed in the Walloon Region, namely the removal of 5 000 ha and the addition of 12 000 ha, are an aberration or can they on the contrary be put into the same category as alterations to boundaries seen in cases in other Member States?

Considering that the 2007 assessment of heritage sites of Community interest revealed an extremely poor situation, what is the Commission's reaction to learning that there are now 6 000 new hectares which meet European criteria (notably priority habitat areas, something the network is short of) in the Walloon Region?

Moreover, under the rules in the Walloon Region and in view of the state of our natural heritage, the decrees designating these areas need urgently to be brought into force. Does the Commission intend to call upon Belgium and more specifically the Walloon Region to implement these rules without further delay?