

NATURE SCORE CARD

Latvia

Latvia has been a member of the European Union since 2004. Its Natura 2000 network consists of 333 sites, covering 11833km², all of which are terrestrial (11.53% of the land area) while marine N2000 sites are covering 4387km². The below analysis and recommendations suggest that national authorities still need to make further efforts in order to fully implement the Birds and Habitats Directives and effective conservation of threatened species and habitats to be achieved on the ground.

	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transposition of the Birds and Habitats Directive • Site designation • Avoid deterioration of sites, disturbance of species and implementation of appropriate assessments • Habitats and species monitoring • Species protection • Landscape connectivity • Non-native species • Stakeholder engagement, public participation and communication
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of sites • Funding & resources • Promotion of research

ACTION PLAN FOR NATURE IN LATVIA

<p>Transposition and designation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientifically justified conservation objectives have to be set on the site level for each Natura 2000 site. 	<p>Prevention of negative impacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up the conservation objectives for Natura 2000 sites has to be the process that is done based on scientific criteria, without the influence from economic sectors. • Protection of species and habitats outside of Natura 2000 sites should be ensured
<p>Active management to achieve favourable conservation status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The capacity of institution supervising the Appropriate Assessment procedures should be increased. • The connectivity of Natura 2000 sites have to be considered and measures taken to ensure it. 	<p>Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal thresholds for national financing for Natura 2000 should be set, based on coverage of Natura 2000 in each country. • General expenditure of nature conservation authorities (for day-to-day operation) should not be counted towards national Natura 2000 funding, unless they can prove that it is DIRECTLY targeted at reaching the goals set for Natura 2000 network in a systematic manner
<p>Monitoring and research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring should be continuous and should provide clear answers in regards to the status of habitats and species of EU importance 	<p>Stakeholder engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve NGOs and private sector in implementation of the Natura 2000 network, develop and implement mechanisms related to financial and social incentives for the local communities.

The information in this scorecard is based on expert analysis from Latvian Fund for Nature (LDF), Latvian Ornithological Society (LOB). Full details on the following pages.

LEGAL REQUIREMENT	STATUS IN LATVIA
<p>Transposition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formally, the transposition is completed. But some of it remains only “on paper”. For example, the Law “On Conservation of Species and Biotopes” does mention the requirement to ensure the favourable conservation status for species and habitats. However, this requirement is not fully enforced (especially for habitats, and outside of the Natura 2000 sites), and thus the reality of habitat conservation is very different from the situation on paper.
<p>Site designation</p> <p>Designate and establish sites that form the Natura 2000 network of protected areas</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive, art. 3 & 4</i> <i>Birds Directive, art. 3 & 4</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The terrestrial Natura 2000 network is incomplete. Currently, there are 333 Natura 2000 sites designated in Latvia with a total terrestrial area 7446 km² (11.53% of total land area). From these, 7421 km² are covered by sites designated as SCI and 6609 km² as SPA. Designation process has not been completed, as there are areas of significant nature conservation values that are not under protection yet. The sufficiency evaluation of sites under the Habitats Directive (determined by DG Environment, with the assistance of the European Topic Centre for Biological Diversity) points to the need for additional areas as well. Latvia has not established Natura 2000 sites in EEZ yet. Proposals for new sites have been included in the Marine Spatial Plan, version 1. There is a recently started BONUS project BASMATI that plans to develop a tool for assessment of new protected areas in the sea, and for evaluation of the existing ones. All Latvian marine waters are included in this project. Natura 2000 sites have been integrated into national networks. The networks on nationally protected areas and Natura 2000 sites in Latvia largely overlap. Most of the Natura 2000 sites have been assigned a protection category in the national protected areas system (nature reserve, strict nature reserve, nature park, protected area landscape, etc.).
<p>Management of sites</p> <p>Establish site protection measures in Natura 2000 sites</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive, art. 6(1)</i> <i>Birds Directives, art. 4(1) & 4(2)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No conservation objective has been set at a site level. There has been a mixed return on the development of management plans. Some sites have produced their management plans (40%), other are outdated and for some sites no management plans have been developed. However, not all sites require management plans The management plans lack specifically defined and quantified conservation objectives and assessment of the impact of measures on the FCS. The conservation measures proposed for Natura 2000 tools are inadequate in combating climate change.
<p>Species protection</p> <p>Ensure species protection</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive, art. 12-16</i> <i>Birds Directive, art. 5-9</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are 16 species action plans to date: <i>Dryomys nitedula</i>, <i>Leucorrhinia caudalis</i>, <i>Coronella austriaca</i>, <i>Unio crassus</i>, <i>Hirudo medicinalis</i>, <i>Bufo calamita</i>, <i>Emys orbicularis</i>, <i>Bombina bombina</i>, <i>Osmoderma eremita</i>, <i>Tetrao urogallus</i>, <i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i>, <i>Tetrao tetrix</i>, <i>Ursus arctos</i>, <i>Canis lupus</i>, <i>Lynx lynx</i>, <i>Ciconia nigra</i>. Only the first three plans are officially functional (are not outdated), the rest are out of date, last four of the listed plans are in the process of updating now. These species action plans are not applied systemically, but on a project by project basis. There are permits and derogations for activities that are impacting protected species, see here.
<p>Avoid deterioration of sites, disturbance of species and appropriate assessment</p> <p>Ensure no deterioration of habitats and disturbance to species in Natura 2000 sites</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Article 6.3 procedures to assess projects and plans have been established. Qualification of involved experts is not always adequate. Quality of expert statements may not be sufficient and generally is not properly controlled by the supervising institutions.

<p><i>Habitats Directive, art.6(2)</i></p> <p>Ensure that plans or projects likely to affect Natura 2000 sites are subject to appropriate assessment</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive 6(3)</i></p> <p>Ensure that developments affecting the integrity of the site are not approved unless there are no alternative solutions, and for imperative reasons of overriding public interest and if compensatory measures are taken</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive 6(4)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experts may not be considered truly independent as far as they are paid by the initiators of planned (development) activities. This problem is partly mitigated by the existing system of expert certification – in case of abuse of expert’s position they may be stripped of their certificates. • The precautionary principle has been applied. • There have not been any formal cases for “overriding public interest criteria”. Largest recent development project (Rail Baltica) was designed with the focus to avoid crossing Natura 2000 area (crossing of farming and housing areas were chosen instead, although it was heavily opposed by local municipalities).
<p>Landscape connectivity</p> <p>Encourage the management of landscape features to improve the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive art. 3(3) & 10</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connectivity is not integrated within the Natura 2000 management documents and implementation. • There are other designated protected areas, we have a category of micro reserves, but the use of this instrument is not streamlined and not coordinated. It is applied on case by case basis, when protection of spp or habitat is necessary.
<p>Funding and resources</p> <p>Identify funding needs</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive, art. 8</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first version of the Prioritized Action Framework was finalized in 2013-2014, but its final version is not publicly available. To date, the needs identified in this document have not been reflected in the planning and budgeting processes. • The recurrent costs per 1 ha of Natura 2000 territory are estimated as 44 euro/ha annually including one-off cost at 71 euro/ha for time period 2014-2020. • The total amount for Natura 2000: 395,495,280 euro for 2014-2020
<p>Habitats and species monitoring</p> <p>Undertake monitoring of the conservation status of habitats and species of Community importance</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive, art.11</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring system in place, but poor implementation. For example some monitoring programs are designed, but have not been launched. • The data quality is variable, depending on the source topic. Data coming from annual spp/habitats monitoring programs is good. However, a large proportion of assessments are still based on expert opinion rather than objectively measured data. And that is subjective and not always good. • Data is mostly publicly available, but it depends on the type of data. Data from publicly funded monitoring are public (annual monitoring reports). Data from individual experts (expert opinions) are often not public.
<p>Promotion of research</p> <p>Encourage research and scientific work</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive, art. 18</i> <i>Birds Directive, art. 10</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no national funding for research on status of threatened species. Some assessments are being done as part of species management plans, or individual projects by scientists. But there is no systematic funding for research on the above topic.
<p>Non-native species</p> <p>Ensure that introductions of non-native species do not prejudice native habitats and species</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive, art. 22</i> <i>Birds Directive, art. 11</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fact that the problem of invasive species is covered by site management plans does not necessarily mean that this problem will be addressed in practice (site management plans are not implemented systematically). Eradication of invasive species is mostly done on the project basis or during campaigns and is not supervised at national level. There are few exceptions – e.g. eradication of Sosnowsky's hogweed by State forest company “Latvijas Valsts meži”.
<p>Stakeholder engagement, public participation and communication</p> <p>Stakeholder engagement and public participation are key to ensuring effective implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to the Law on Specially Protected Nature Territories, any person can propose a protected territory, by submitting the proposal to the Nature Conservation Agency (NCA). NCA informs local governments, publishes a note in the national gazette, and informs the landowners. • There are several steps taken, in the process of development of the management plans, to involve the stakeholders:

- 1) Upon starting the procedure of the elaboration of the MP, local stakeholders are informed via announcements in the municipality and by organising the information meeting for all stakeholders,
 - 2) For each site management plan, as Supervisory Group is established, that includes representatives from all stakeholder groups,
 - 3) The entity in charge of developing the site management plan reports to the Supervisory Group (SG) that supervises the work and evaluates the proposed management measures. SG also determines when the plan is ready for public hearing.
 - 4) A public hearing is organised at the end of management planning process, as a public meeting.
 - 5) After the public hearing, the last SG meeting is organised, to endorse the plan.
- There is limited transparency on matters related to the forestry and agriculture policies, public consultations are often formal and the recommendations from the nature protection civil society organisations are often disregarded without sufficient justification.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LATVIA

(Recommendations are not ranked by priority).

1. Scientifically justified conservation objectives have to be set on the site level for each Natura 2000 site. It has to be a unified national exercise, not something that is done separately, for each site management plan.
2. Setting up the conservation objectives for Natura 2000 sites has to be the process that is done based on scientific criteria, without the influence from economic sectors. Following on when the management plans are elaborated, all relevant stakeholders should be involved in discussion about the measures applied to sites.
3. Minimal thresholds for national financing for Natura 2000 should be set, based on coverage of Natura 2000 in each country. General expenditure of nature conservation authorities (for day-to-day operation) should not be counted towards national Natura 2000 funding, unless they can prove that it is DIRECTLY targeted at reaching the goals set for Natura 2000 network in a systematic manner.
4. There is a need for Natura 2000 communication strategy and a dedicated budget for its implementation.
5. The connectivity of Natura 2000 sites have to be considered and measures taken to ensure it. It could be done for example based on the results of distribution inventories of habitats of EU importance (nationwide inventory is now underway).
6. Protection of species and habitats outside of Natura 2000 sites should be ensured. This process would require: 1) full mapping of all habitats and species, 2) establishing the conservation goals for each habitat/species; 3) defining the favourable conservation status for each habitat/species and measures necessary to ensure it.

7. Monitoring should be continuous and should provide clear answers in regards to the status of habitats and species of EU importance. All of the 16 species Action plans, listed in the chapter "Species protection" of this checklist, are defining monitoring activities among actions that are to be implemented.
8. The capacity of institution supervising the Appropriate Assessment procedures should be increased, to allow them to undertake alternate assessments. The institution should be independent of all political/economic pressures.
9. Precautionary principle should be fully enforced in Latvia, prohibiting the exploitation of the values of EU importance, unless it has been proven by the developer that the activity in question does not have negative influence on their conservation status.
10. "Polluter pays" principle should be applied to any acts of destruction of habitats and species, thus providing additional incentives for businesses to avoid the destruction of habitats and species for development.
11. NGOs and the private sector should be involved in the implementation of the Natura 2000 network. Mechanisms related to financial and social incentives for the local communities should be developed and implemented.