



# Stakeholder perceptions about the management of Natura 2000 sites

A survey in France, Flanders, England and the Netherlands



To protect biodiversity, all Member States of the European Union have designated Natura 2000 sites. These sites are protected areas where conservation measures are encouraged and damaging activities require an assessment. Many different stakeholders are involved in the management of Natura 2000 sites, either as owners of the sites or as users. This WOt-paper reviews how involved stakeholders perceive the impact of the designation of areas as Natura 2000 sites on the subsequent management.

## Survey

To find this out, researchers carried out a survey in 91 Natura 2000 sites in England, France, Flanders and the Netherlands between March and May 2015 (see Table 1 and Map 1). The stakeholders invited for the survey were either involved in the governance structures which have been set up to develop management plans or in the physical management of the sites themselves<sup>1</sup>. A total of 2342 stakeholders were requested to fill in the survey. This was done by email (also by post in England and France), with one reminder. This process resulted in 464 replies (response rate of 20%). Table 2 shows the share of respondents from different actor groups.

<sup>1</sup> In France, the Netherlands and Flanders different parties are involved in the development of the management plans. In France the members of the *Comité de Pilotage*, in the Netherlands the members of the Steering Group and Advisory board or *Stuurgroep en Klankbord Groep* and in Flanders the members of the Consultation Groups or *Overlegplatforms*. In England no specific management planning process has been set up so stakeholders involved in the actual management of the site were approached.

The study also reviewed whether the type of stakeholder, the country of origin or the status of prior designation of the site as a conservation area had any influence on the opinion of respondents.

Whilst it is presently the largest survey of this kind, caution should be exercised when drawing far-reaching conclusions specifically when extrapolating them to the management of Natura sites 2000 in the EU generally, given the relatively low response of the parties involved in the survey and the limited number of sites reviewed (7% of the sites). This research project was commissioned by PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency and funded by the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs. The report outlining findings of the research is published as [WOt-rapport 128](#).

## Main findings of the survey

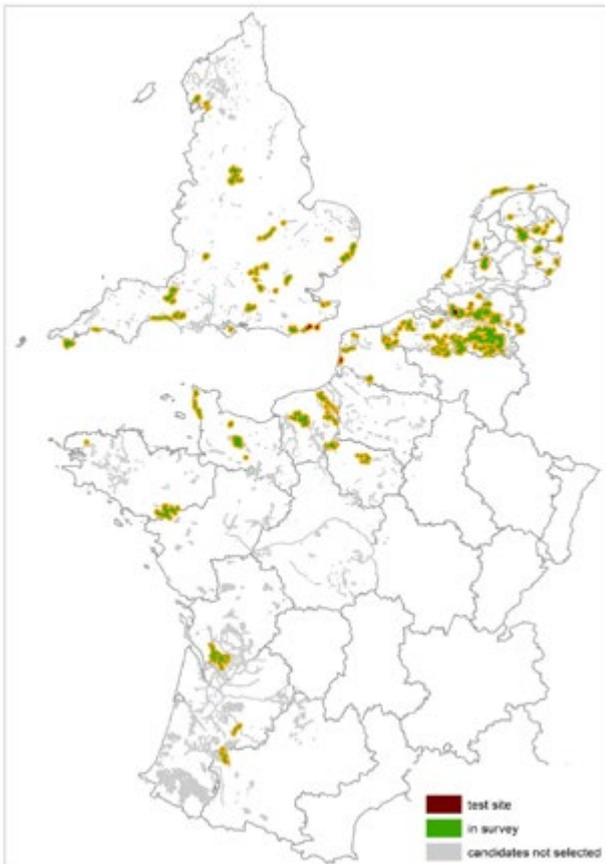
Overall, the results of the survey indicate that the background of the respondents (whether they are from the agricultural sector, nature sector, government or other stakeholders) seems to have a (large to small)



Riverbanks of the Allier (France)

**Table 1** Overview of number of sites and respondents per region or country. All sites surveyed are within the Atlantic biogeographical region.

Geographical area	Natura 2000 sites			Stakeholders		
	Number of sites	Total in the country	Natura 2000 sites surveyed (%)	Sent	Respondents	Complete and partial complete (%)
Flanders	22	62	35%	289	99	34%
Netherlands	26	162	16%	339	147	43%
France (Atlantic biogeographical region)	17	697	2%	1148	144	13%
England	26	338	8%	566	74	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>1259</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>2342</b>	<b>464</b>	<b>20%</b>



**Map 1** Location of 91 Natura 2000 sites in survey

**Table 2** Share of respondents from different stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder types	Share of responses
Owner/user/ representative agricultural sector	11
Owner/user/ representative forestry sector	3
Owner/user/ representative nature sector	17
Owner/user/ representative other sectors	11
Government	34
Other stakeholders	24

effect on the perceptions of stakeholders on the management of the area, especially in regards to statements that measure impacts or value judgements. Opinions differ on the benefits of the discussion in relation to the management of the area between the local stakeholders and the government, the impact of changes in the management for specific sectors and on the issue whether the conservation measures are enough to ensure the conservation of species and habitats.

Although the implementation in the four geographical areas is very different, overall only small differences between the respondents' views between the countries and regions are found in this survey. Also the status of



Coastal dunes in the Netherlands

prior protection (e.g. whether the site was already designated before the introduction of Natura 2000) seems to have small effect on how respondents see the impact of Natura 2000. Respondents from sites already (fully or partly) designated have a more positive view on the management discussions between the government and stakeholders. At the same time they see less impact of Natura 2000 designation in measures taken for the species in the site.

## Results of specific questions

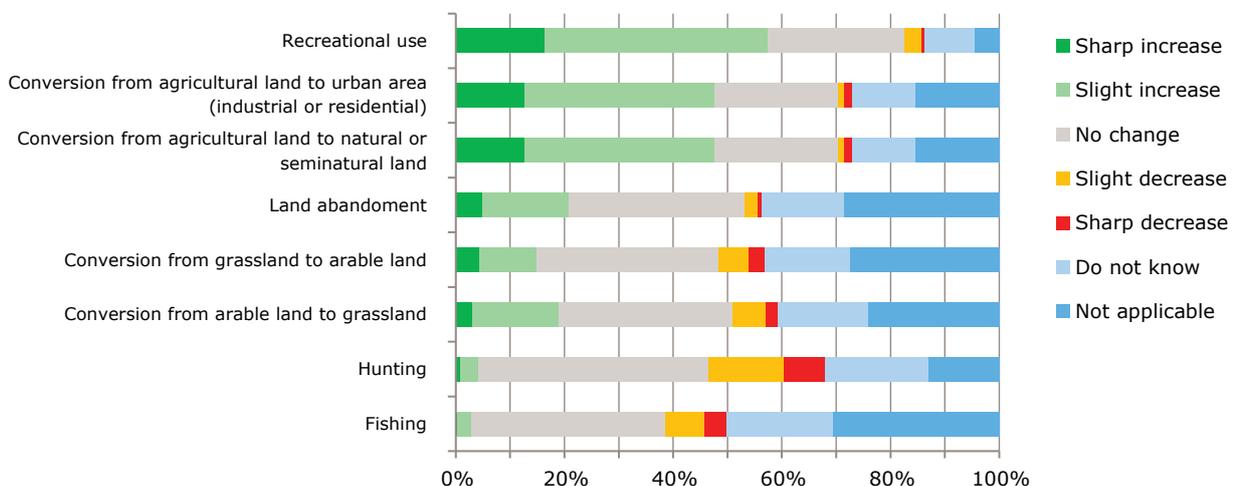
### Change in use and management of the area

Stakeholders were asked which changes they perceived in the use and management of the area during the last ten years. Overall the majority of respondents indicate that

they notice an increase in recreational use of sites. In addition, a number of conversions from agricultural land, to urban functions as well as to (semi) natural land, have been observed (Figure 1).

In respect to the current conservation management of the areas, the respondents perceive that the number of measures taken for habitats and species in Natura 2000 sites has increased since the start of discussion between the government and local stakeholders. The majority of the respondents (63%) reported that – following the start of discussions on management plans and management – there was an increase in the number of measures for the species and habitats the site was designated for (Figure 2). The perception of the respondents does not depend on the type of stakeholder, nor on the country or region that they live in.

*To what extent have you noticed changes in the management and use of the area in the last 10 years? (N=369)*



**Figure 1** Perceived change in management/ use of the area.

### Sufficiency of the current number of measures

When asked whether the current measures were considered sufficient to protect the species at the site, 8% considered them more than sufficient, 35% sufficient, 15% neutral, 25% not sufficient and 7% very insufficient. 9% of the respondents did not know. The opinion of respondents seems to be related to the type of stakeholders the respondents belong to. Overall, respondents from the nature sector consider that the current measures are not sufficient while respondents belonging to the agricultural sector<sup>2</sup> find them sufficient. It is important to note that these are perceptions and do not therefore (necessarily) reflect the actual conservation status of the species at the site.

### Beneficial aspects of the local discussion between the government and stakeholders

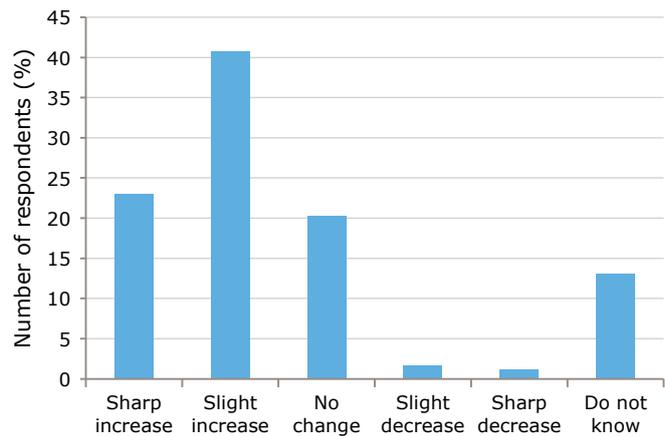
In the survey, questions were also asked about the way the discussion about the management between the government and involved stakeholders was perceived. Here opinions vary considerably between the stakeholders. 29% of the respondents indicate that all interests were given equal weight and 48% indicate that they were not (Figure 3). Opinions also vary in respect to the benefits of the management discussions for the site. More than 40% of the respondents agreed with the statements that the local process had created support for the measures, increased co-operation and had increased the awareness of the European importance of the site. However, 20% did not perceive increased co-operation (some even saw increasing conflicts). Although a majority of the stakeholders perceived benefits from this process, respondents from the agricultural sector in particular see fewer benefits from the local discussions between government (the administrators of Natura 2000 process) and local stakeholders than other respondents. If the site was already designated as a protected area respondents were more positive about the discussions between government and stakeholders.

### Effect of measures taken by the government

The survey also asked respondents about their view on the impact of measures taken by the government for the site. The two governmental measures, which are 1) funding for nature management by the state nature institutes and 2) the development of rules and regulations, were considered by the biggest proportion of respondents to have had a very high to high impact (up to 39% of the respondents). Overall, almost all measures taken by the government have had, according to the majority of the respondents, to a greater or lesser degree an impact on the management of the area (Figure 4). The opinion of the respondents seems not to depend on the type of stakeholder, nor on the status

<sup>2</sup> The majority of the respondents are farmers representatives

*Did the number of measures implemented for the species or habitats for which the site is designated change following the start of the discussions about the management? (N=344)*



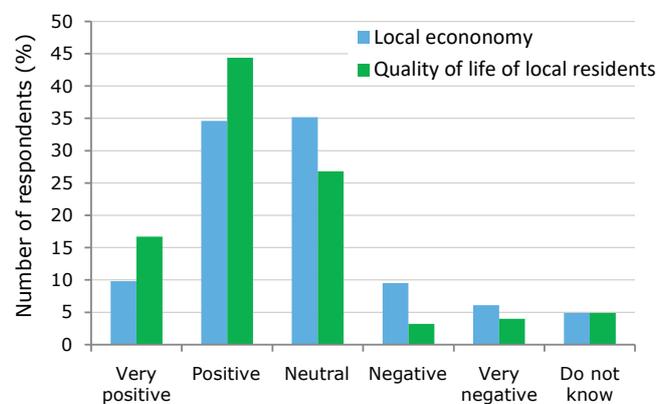
**Figure 2** Change in number of measures following the start of discussions about management, as perceived by respondents.

of prior designation. There is a very small effect in relation to the country or region the respondents come from.

### Impact on local economy and well-being of residents

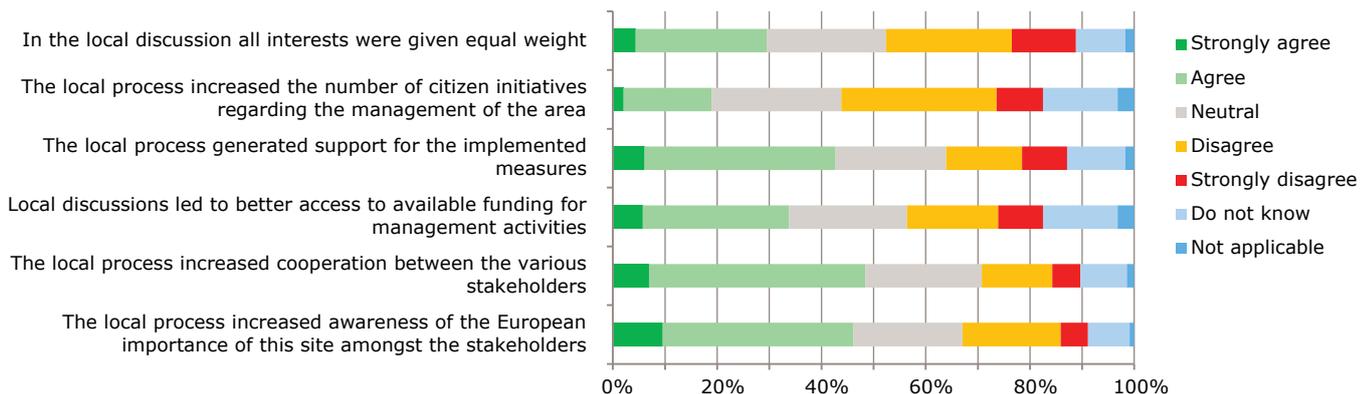
Asked about the impact of Natura 2000 designation and management on the future of the area, 44% of the respondents felt that Natura 2000 will have a positive to very positive impact for the local economy. Furthermore, the majority of respondents (61%) felt that the Natura 2000 designation will have a positive to very positive impact on the well-being of local residents (Figure 5). However, both responses depend on stakeholder type – respondents from the nature sector indicate a more positive impact for local economy and quality of life than respondents belonging to other sectors.

*What type of impact do you feel the designation and management of the area as Natura 2000 area will have on the future of the area in the following fields? (N=347)*



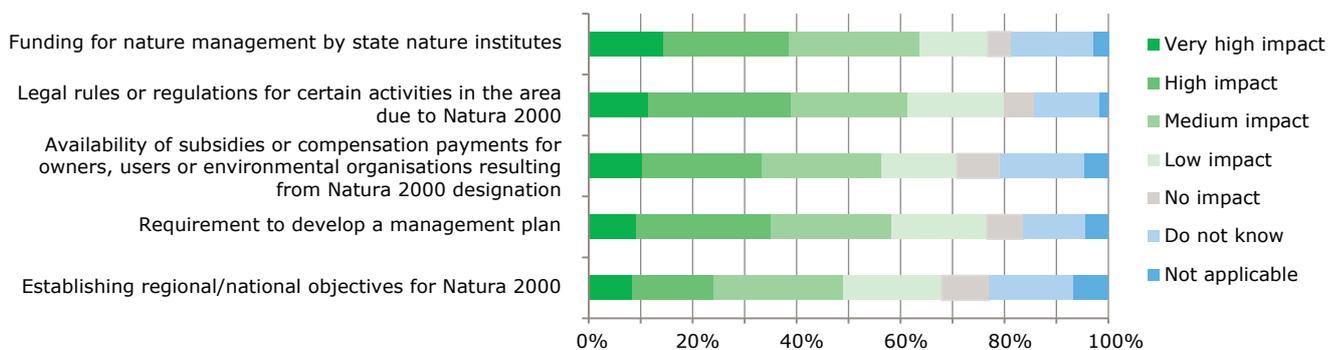
**Figure 5** Impact in the future of designation and management of the area as Natura 2000 site .

*What is your opinion in relation to the following statement about the discussion concerning the management of the area between officials and stakeholders? (N= 349)*



**Figure 3** Opinion of respondents on the benefits of the local management discussions.

*Can you indicate which of the following measures taken by the government have contributed to changes in the management of the area? (N=350)*



**Figure 4** Perceived impacts of governmental measures for change in areas' management.



Small stream in Exmoor (England, UK).

## Colofon

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