



Criteria for assessing sufficiency of sites designation for habitats listed in annex I and species listed in annex II of the Habitats Directive.

Background

Annex III of the Habitats Directive provides the framework for assessing the sufficiency of designation, by Member States of Sites of Community Interest (SCI) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for habitats listed in Annex I and species listed in Annex II of the Habitats Directive.

The European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity of the European Environment Agency (EEA-ETC/BD) assists the European Commission in this assessment process. Decisions on sufficiency are made during the annual sufficiency evaluation exercise, biogeographical seminars or bilateral meetings between the Commission and individual countries. The EEA-ETC/BD, along with NGOs and invited experts take part in discussions during the bilateral meetings and seminars, presenting their evaluations of Annex I habitats and Annex II species as a starting point of dialogue.

Annex III of the Habitats Directives involves two stages as follows:

Stage 1 is to be applied at national level and aims at an “*assessment at national level of the relative importance of sites for each natural habitat type in Annex I and each species in Annex II (including priority natural habitat types and priority species)*”. These criteria list the site attributes to be taken into account when considering a certain habitat and species:

A. Site assessment criteria for a given natural habitat type in Annex I

- Degree of **representativity** of the natural habitat type on the site.
- **Area of the site** covered by the natural habitat type in relation to the total area covered by that natural habitat type within national territory.
- **Degree of conservation** of the structure and functions of the natural habitat type concerned and restoration possibilities.
- Global assessment of the value of the site for conservation of the natural habitat type concerned.

B. Site assessment criteria for a given species in Annex II

- Size and density of the **population** of the species present on the site in relation to the populations present within national territory.
- **Degree of conservation** of the features of the habitat which are important for the species concerned and restoration possibilities.
- **Degree of isolation** of the population present on the site in relation to the natural range of the species.
- Global assessment of the value of the site for conservation of the species concerned.

Stage 2 targets an “*assessment of the Community importance of the sites included on the national lists*” by taking into account:

- the relative value of the site at national level;
- the geographical situation of the site in relation to migration routes of species in Annex II and whether it belongs to a continuous ecosystem situated on both sides of one or more internal Community frontiers;
- the total area of the site;
- the number of natural habitat types in Annex I and species in Annex II present on the site;
- the global ecological value of the site for the biogeographical regions concerned and/or for the whole of the territory referred to in Article 2, as regards both the characteristic of unique aspect of its features and the way they are combined.

Criteria for a sufficiency assessment at a biogeographical level

To ensure that all Annex I habitat and Annex II species are sufficiently represented at national and biogeographical level, we need to ensure that for a given feature the SCI/SAC Network fulfils the following criteria:

1. It shall host a **sufficiently large and representative sample** of each habitat type and species to enable the maintenance of favourable conservation status at the level of the EU and at biogeographical level, provided the supporting conservation measures within and outside the sites are in place.
There should be a proportionate response, so that for those habitats and species of community interest which are rarest a high proportion of the resource will be included within the SAC Network, while for those which are more abundant there will be a lower proportion of the resource within the SAC Network.
2. It should be well-adapted to the specific conservation needs, in particular to those related to the **distribution** patterns (endemicity, degree of isolation/fragmentation, historical trends) and to the human pressures, threats, vulnerability, etc. of the considered species or habitat type; and
3. It should reflect the ecological (and in the case of species genetic) **variation** of the habitat or species within the biogeographical region.

The EEA-ETC/BD has developed some additional specifications to facilitate the evaluation process in a practical way based mainly on the content of SCI/SAC [Standard Data Forms](#) and information reported under [Article 17 of the Habitats Directive](#).

This is focused primarily at the level of biogeographical region by member state.

The following procedure is not proposed as a strictly numerical mechanism for deciding, on the basis of a predetermined percentage, the level of sufficient/insufficient representative of each one of the habitat types or species in the whole of SCI/SAC Network for a biogeographical region in a MS. However, it does take into account additional information on different parameters related to each species and habitat type in the biogeographical context, which means that in most cases, assessments must be undertaken on a case-by-case basis.

1. Well represented species or habitat types for which the whole of the proposed sites for a biogeographical region host more than 60% of the total population (or area) in the biogeographical region of a member state will be considered sufficient. In practice, the implementation of the appropriate conservation measures in a sample of designated sites covering 60% of the population of a given species (or 60% of the area of distribution of a given habitat type) should ensure in most of cases the maintenance of favourable conservation status as defined in the Habitat Directive.
2. However exceptions to this general rule may be justified on a scientific basis, for example where habitats or species found only in one very restricted geographical area or where the habitat or species is rare and recent decline means that an increase of the resource is required to maintain favourable conservation status. In this case, the percentage could be higher.
3. When species or habitat types for which the whole of the proposed sites for a biogeographical region host 20% or less of the total population (or area) in the biogeographical region of a MS, this coverage or population might not guarantee the maintenance of the feature in a Favourable Conservation Status. For certain aquatic species covered by Article 4.1¹ and a number of habitats and species which are widespread, extensive and show a limited range of ecological or genetic variation 20% of the resource within the SCI/SAC Network could be judged as adequate.

¹ For animal species ranging over wide areas these sites shall correspond to the places within the natural range of such species which present the physical or biological factors essential to their life and reproduction. For aquatic species which range over wide areas, such sites will be proposed only where there is a clearly identifiable area representing the physical and biological factors essential to their life and reproduction.

These percentages were originally proposed to help focus discussion where it was most needed, they still give useful guidance but their application must always be accompanied by other criteria (such as distribution and variation), they can never be used in isolation.

The analysis involves a comparison between the geographical distribution of the sites submitted by the member states for a given habitat type or species and its known distribution patterns; an assessment of the trends of distribution and abundance of the habitats and species related to natural and anthropogenic factors.

Evaluators shall identify and research those areas containing a significant example of an Annex I habitat type or Annex II species.

Using the Standard Data Forms, the evaluators compare the population for species and the area for habitat types (fields relative surface and cover) between member states' databases, expecting to see at least some population or area evaluated as A, B or C.

Relative surface² represents the area of the site covered by a natural habitat type in relation to the total area covered by that natural habitat type within the national territory. It is expressed as percentage and arises from estimation according to the best judgement.

A: $100 \geq p > 15\%$

B: $15 \geq p > 2\%$

C: $2 \geq p > 0\%$

D: non-significant presence

Population represents size and density of the population of a species present on the site in relation to the population present within national territory. The optimal measure is the percentage resulting from the ratio of the population in the site/population in the national territory.

A: $100 \geq p > 15\%$

B: $15 \geq p > 2\%$

C: $2 \geq p > 0\%$

D: non-significant presence

For member states data is available from the SDF, the latest Article 17 report and the [Natura 2000 viewer](#) for spatial data. Where Article 17 data is not complete or considered non satisfactory, other data sets should be used. Moreover, the analysis will also be supported by a check of the scientific literature and advice of experts.

Evaluators should contribute to the coherence of the Natura 2000 Network, identifying those connecting areas that will help to reach the favourable conservation status:

- SCI/SAC situated in a migration route of one or more species in Annex II and identified as indispensable for its maintaining in a favourable conservation status;
- SCI/SAC representing a "relic" localisation for a habitat type or species, acting as "ecological corridors" between other identified SCI hosting priority species which are now endangered due to their fragmentation; sets of pSCI covering a continuous ecosystem situated on both sides of one or more internal Community frontiers;
- SCI/SAC bordering a major protected area situated outside of EU borders;

The most common problem encountered is the lack of information. Although data is available from Article 17 and the Standard Data Forms, this information is not always accurate because it has not been updated or it is based only on model data. In most cases it is also necessary to use the scientific literature. On-line databases, either national or international, can be useful sources of information.

² <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32011D0484&from=EN>

Type of sufficiency conclusions:

SUF (Sufficient): the occurrence of the species /habitat type is sufficiently well covered by the current SCIs; no further sites are required.

IN MIN (Insufficient minor): no new SCIs are required, but this species /habitat type should be added to the list of qualifying features on one or several Standard Data Forms of sites that have already been proposed for other species /habitat types.

IN MOD (Insufficient moderate): one or several additional SCIs (or extensions of SCIs) must be proposed to achieve a sufficient coverage of the Natura 2000 network for this species/ habitat type (IN MOD GEO means additional site(s) are only required in a specifically named region).

IN MAJ (Insufficient major): none of the sites where this species/ habitat type occurs have been proposed as SCIs so far; in order to achieve a sufficient coverage of the Natura 2000 network for the species /habitat type, one or several of these new SCIs must therefore be proposed.

SR (Scientific reserve): further research is required to identify the most appropriate SCIs for this species / habitat type (research on identifying the most appropriate sites, on clarifying the correspondence of a habitat present to the definition of Annex I habitats, etc.).

SR Ref List (Scientific reserve on the Reference List): the regular occurrence of this species /habitat type is still uncertain and needs to be confirmed.

Delete from Ref List (delete from the Reference List): this species /habitat type is not naturally occurring and will be removed from the Reference List; no sites are required for this species /habitat type.

CD (Correction of data): the information about this species /habitat type in the Standard Data Form needs to be corrected / completed / deleted.

Codes can be combined, for example 'IN MOD/ CD' would indicate that additional sites are required and that the existing proposals need correcting or completing.

Basic links for the sufficiency analysis:

<http://natura2000.eea.europa.eu/>

http://bd.eionet.europa.eu/activities/Reporting/Article_17/Reports_2013

<http://www.iucnredlist.org/>

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32011D0484&from=E>