

Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats



Standing Committee

Recommendation No. 113 (2004) of the Standing Committee on the installation of a new antenna (Pluto II) in the Sovereign Base Area (Akrotiri, Cyprus)

(adopted by the Standing Committee on 3 December 2004)

The Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, acting under the terms of Article 14 of the Convention,

Having regard to the aims of the Convention to conserve wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats;

Recalling that under Article 4 of the Convention each Contracting Party shall take appropriate and necessary legislative and administrative measures to ensure the conservation of the habitats of the wild flora and fauna species, especially those specified in Appendices I and II, and the conservation of endangered natural habitats;

Recalling that Article 4 of the Convention stipulates that the Contracting Parties in their planning and development policies shall have regard to the conservation requirements of the areas protected under the preceding paragraph, so as to avoid or minimise as far as possible any deterioration of such areas;

Recalling that Article 4 of the Convention stipulates that the Contracting Parties undertake to give special attention to the protection of areas that are of importance for the migratory species specified in Appendices II and III and which are appropriately situated in relation to migration routes, as wintering, staging, feeding, breeding or moulting areas;

Noting however that Article 9, paragraph 1, states that a Party may make exceptions from the provisions of Articles 4, 5, 6, 7 and from the prohibition of the use of the means mentioned in Article 8 provided that there is no other satisfactory solution and that the exception will not be detrimental to the survival of the population concerned;

Referring to the report of Mr Eckhart Kuijken drawn up following his on-the-spot appraisal [document T-PVS/Files (2004) 21];

Bearing in mind the work carried out by the independent international panel of experts of the IEMA (Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, Lincoln, United Kingdom) as well as the findings of the Ramsar Convention mission conducted in June 2002 to the Akrotiri Salt Lake;

Noting that the construction of the communication antennae is considered vital on security grounds and that they are an essential part of worldwide communication networks;

Noting that the Akrotiri wetland contains a combination of inland saline and freshwater wetland habitats unique in the biogeographic region of the eastern Mediterranean;

Noting that this ecosystem is listed as an “Important Bird Area” and was designated by the United Kingdom as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention as agreed with the Cypriot Ministry of Foreign Affairs;

Considering that this area is a major component in the implementation of the Natura 2000 / Emerald Network;

Having taken note that the local population of Akrotiri village has expressed serious concern over the health risk from the repeated exposure to radiation;

Convinced of the need for co-operation between the Sovereign Base Area (SBA) and the Cypriot authorities and the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in order to ensure regular monitoring and to carry out field observations and research;

Stressing also the need for good communication with local residents, especially on the subject of health;

Having noted monitoring of bird movements by night vision equipment illustrating that some mortality occurs (RPS-Ecoscope Report);

Aware of the mitigation measures already taken by the British authorities to prevent bird collisions;

Recognising furthermore the de facto contribution of the military presence to the conservation of natural values of Akrotiri and surrounding coastal strips;

Further noting that the natural value of the site makes it an inherently inappropriate location for developments that pose a potential threat to wildlife;

Wishing that the possible establishment of a new antennae in the area or the expansion of the existing antennae or other development that may lead to deterioration of the site be subject to a thorough prior Environmental Impact Assessment and to a wide public consultation procedures involving, as appropriate, Cyprus authorities;

Recommends to:

1. Further monitor on a long-term basis the consequences of the construction of the Pluto I and II antennae in a site with ornithological values of international importance, especially in order to better estimate the overall level of bird mortality; it is recommended to establish networks of SBA experts together with NGOs and the Cypriot authorities and to join efforts for both monitoring and the design of additional experimental research and the development of further mitigating measures to minimise the effects of the antenna park on bird movements;
2. Monitor radiation levels in order to assess effects on bird orientation, but in the first place to assure local populations that there are no health problems even when the antennae are operated simultaneously; independent validation of monitoring data is to be guaranteed and additional opportunities for biological experimental research are to be considered in view of the precautionary principle;
3. Draw up an integrated management plan for the whole wetland complex of the Salt Lake and Fissouri Marsh, including surrounding areas of outstanding ecological importance (beaches, dunes, rocky shorelines), taking into account the requirements of the Ramsar and Bern Conventions and of the European Union directives in order to safeguard the international values;
4. Ensure that the establishment of the management plan or other plans and projects are based on public consultation and mutual agreements between the SBAA, the Cypriot authorities and specialised NGOs and that it is communicated to all stakeholders, especially local residents.

Crucial aspects to be included are, among others:

- i. water management (quantity and quality, influence by agricultural chemicals, etc.), coastal protection, bird preservation, habitat conservation and vegetation management;
- ii. specific actions to avoid bird disturbances (by cars, visitors, shooting, bird trapping, model airplanes), including the mitigating measures in the antennae park;
- iii. regulations concerning recreational land use and physical planning taking into account the limits of the area's carrying capacity by preventing irreversible development of beach recreation facilities;
- iv. a restricted policy for building permissions in order to prevent increased pressure on the environment;

- v. a chapter on further establishment of environmental and nature education, monitoring and research, including provision of budgets for personnel, equipment and functioning costs (leaflets, exhibitions, etc);
5. Remove gradually the western edge of the eucalyptus belt north of the Salt Lake and on the south-eastern edge of Fissouri Marsh in order to alleviate the risks of bird collisions with Pluto antennae; the effects of cuttings must be carefully monitored for all groups of species (waterbirds, raptors, passerines) as well as the ecological consequences on the water level and the potential for vegetation restoration;
6. Take steps to ensure that the archaeological, historical and ecological values of Akrotiri, which represent an underestimated opportunity for environmental and cultural education, especially for schools but also for the public at large be recognised; open and improve some of the signposted trails in the military area as a specific programme of the Akrotiri Information Centre and the future permanent visitors centre, in order to better communicate with the Cypriot population.