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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE  
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Standing Committee**

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**Follow-up of Recommendation No. 113(2004)  
on the installation of a new antenna (Pluto II) in the  
Sovereign Base Area  
(Akrotiri, Cyprus)**

**REPORT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM GOVERNMENT**

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## **RECOMMENDATION NO. 113 (2004) ON THE INSTALLATION OF A NEW ANTENNA (PLUTO II) IN THE SOVEREIGN BASE AREA (Akrotiri, Cyprus)**

### **UPDATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS 1- 6**

*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;*

#### ***Bird collision monitoring***

- Bird collision studies will be completed with the last flight path survey which will be undertaken between September 2010 and November 2010.
- It is still considered that mortality studies within the secure areas are not feasible due to limited and irregular access opportunities (for operational reasons).
- Once all reports have been obtained, it is intended to proceed with a joint (SBAA, RoC, Birdlife Cyprus) appraisal of the data obtained.
- A survey of Demoiselle cranes was carried out by the Akrotiri Environmental Education and Information Centre between mid-August and mid-September 2009, which confirmed negligible collision risk with the antennas under normal circumstances.

*2. Monitor radiation levels in order to assess effects on bird population, 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;*

Item could now be closed, as the Pluto EIA concluded that there was no evidence from which one could predict significant effects of EM radiation on birds, and the results of the Pluto Health Study were covered in the 2007 update to the Bern Convention.

*3. Draw up an integrated management plan for the whole wetland complex of the Salt Lake and Fassouri 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;*

Akrotiri Wetlands candidate SPA has been formally designated in April 2010. A management plan will be drawn up shortly which will take into consideration the conservation objectives for which the area was designated. This will include the prohibition of potentially damaging operations and activities. The management plan will be drawn up in cooperation with the relevant ROC Departments and in consultation with all affected land owners.

Akrotiri Cliffs and Episkopi cliffs candidate SPAs have also been formally designated and the intention is to designate soon Special Areas of Conservation. Once the scientific basis for designation is completed citation documents for candidate SACs will be prepared and they will go through a consultation process with all interested stakeholders.

*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;*

A water level management plan has been commissioned and recommended actions are being discussed with all stakeholders. One of the main issues highlighted currently is the continuing trend of water reduction in all Akrotiri wetlands.

- ii. *specific actions to avoid bird disturbances (by cars, visitors, shooting, bird trapping, model airplanes, including the mitigating measures in the antennae park;*

The SBA Authorities in co-operation with other stakeholders have continued work against wildlife crime. Between January 2009 and May 2010, 37 poachers were arrested and about 1, 000 (shotguns, cartridges, mist-nets etc) have been seized.

Unmanaged access to sensitive areas continues to be a problem, especially with trailer parking and off-road vehicles. Such issues will be managed under the relevant management plans which will be drawn up for the SPAs and SACs. In the meantime the SBA Authorities are installing interpretation signs and are promoting awareness through education at the Akrotiri Environmental Education and Information Centre.

- 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;*

The formal designation of SPAs and management plans which will soon follow will provide protection to important areas from development and other damaging activities. As mentioned in paragraph 3 the SBA Administration intends to designate SACs in the near future but until that happens SBAA policy maintains the consideration of all proposed SACs as if they had been designated, applying the requirement for Appropriate Assessment.

A new Foreshore Ordinance will be in place in the next few months together with a foreshore management policy which has taken the conservation interest (marine turtle nesting areas, structures on the foreshore etc) into account.

- iv. *a restricted policy for building permissions in order to prevent increased pressure on the environment;*

At the moment development is regulated by the SBAA policy on non-military development, which restricts development to local needs based on eligibility criteria. However, this policy replicates the RoC approach which allows for isolated houses outside development 'zones', posing cumulative risks on sensitive areas. In addition, SBAA and the RoC are considering a relaxation of the eligibility criteria and zoning for development within the SBAs. This process needs to be managed carefully and should take account the designated SPAs and the candidate SACs and their conservation objectives. These issues will also need to be addressed under the management plans for the SPAs/SACs.

The assessment process of military projects continues to be thorough and includes sustainability appraisal, EIA and Appropriate Assessment, in line with MoD policy. In addition an Integrated Rural Management Plan (IRMP) is being developed to help manage the impact of all military activities on environmental and historical interest.

- 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.);*

The Akrotiri Environmental Education and Information Centre has continued its successful operation providing, in addition to visitor information, education to schools as part of the Cyprus national curriculum in co-operation with the RoC Ministry of Education and Culture. The Centre, is mainly funded by SBAA and the Community of Akrotiri, but operates on a platform of co-operation with the RoC, NGOs and others. Land has been acquired by SBAA and plans are underway for the establishment of a permanent centre within Akrotiri Village within the next few years

- 5. *Remove gradually the western edge of the eucalyptus belt north of the Salt Lake and on the south-eastern edge of Fassouri 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;*

Decisions on eucalyptus removal and creation of flight paths will be informed by the ongoing flight path surveys and further stakeholder consultation.

At the same time, the invasion of acacia on natural habitats has been recognised as a serious threat to biodiversity and the issue is being addressed in consultation with all stakeholders.

*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 to 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.*

Promotion of these values is mainly provided by the environmental centre as highlighted in 4v above. More than 4,000 school children have visited the centre for educational programmes under the formal school curriculum. Education is provided by a full time teacher seconded at the Centre by the RoC Ministry of Education, supported by Centre staff.

The Centre provides a programme related to the geology and archaeology of the peninsula, which covers areas within the military area, but this is limited at the moment due to security and access procedures.

#### ***Marine turtle conservation in the SBAs***

The Legislative framework that applies to protect marine turtles in the SBAs mirrors the equivalent Republican legislative framework. The Administration is working closely on this issue with the ROC Fisheries Department. At the same time the Administration is undertaking a survey to address the issue of the high number of dead turtles washing up on SBA beaches. The survey has started in May and will continue until November. The intention is to repeat the survey for three years. It involves aerial surveys, boat surveys and diving.

Its specific objectives are:

- a. Confirm the turtle presence within the bay in numbers, species, ages, sex (where possible), timings and locations.
- b. Confirm the methods, intensity, locations and timings of the fishing and sporting activities and the possible connection they may have with the dead turtles washing up on the beach.

The following are also taking place:

- SBAA Marine and Customs Units are undertaking regular sea patrols to identify illegal fishing activities
- SBAA Marine Unit, Customs and Environment Department have established regular contacts with professional fishermen to ensure that they understand the protection status of turtles and that they are aware of fishing restrictions and penalties under Fisheries Legislation and the Protection and Management of Nature Ordinance
- SBAA Marine Unit, Customs and Environment Department have established a positive relationship with local fishermen. Involving them in the process of tackling turtle deaths has led to the collection of information on turtle sightings, deliberate killings and entanglement in nets
- The Akrotiri Environmental Education and Information Centre will continue to provide dedicated programmes on marine turtle conservation to schoolchildren. Last year the Centre provided full day turtle conservation programmes to approximately 1200 school children
- Turtlewatch groups continue to undertake turtle conservation activities (identification and protection of nests) and reporting of damaging and illegal activities both on the foreshore and in the sea.

live months, most of these schoolchildren.