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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

30th meeting
Strasbourg, 6-9 December 2010

**Follow-up of Recommendation No. 133(2004)
on the installation of a new antenna (Pluto II) in the
Sovereign Base Area
(Akrotiri, Cyprus)**

REPORT BY THE NGO

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Nicosia, 15th October 2010

**NGO REPORT TO THE BUREAU OF THE BERN CONVENTION
FROM *BIRDLIFE CYPRUS* AND *TERRA CYPRIA***

With reference to Recommendation No. 113 (2004) on the “Installation of a new antenna (Pluto II) in the Sovereign Base Area (Akrotiri, Cyprus)” (appended), we present below a brief update on the situation on the ground in Cyprus.

The designation of most of the Akrotiri peninsula as the equivalent of a NATURA 2000 site was a significant step forward, but progress remains slow or stalled regarding other aspects of the recommendations, 6 years after these were made. There has been systematic monitoring of bird movements at the Antenna site, but as a formula for long-term mortality monitoring remains elusive, a complete picture of the bird strike situation is unlikely to be gained. BirdLife Cyprus and Terra Cypria continue to enjoy constructive dialogue with the SBAA, and with the SBA conservation team in particular, but the development threat remains alarming despite the designation and many management problems persist.

Drawing up of integrated management plan for the Akrotiri area (recommendations 3 & 4):

In late April 2010, the Sovereign Base Area Administration (SBAA) designated most of the Akrotiri peninsula – Episkopi cliffs Important Bird Area (IBA) as the equivalent of a Special Protection Area (SPA) – a NATURA 2000 site for birds. Designation as the equivalent of a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – a NATURA 2000 site for habitats and non-bird species – is still pending.

A full management plan for the newly designated area has *not* been drawn up and there are outstanding and urgent management issues to be dealt with, not least among which are the many proposed developments, which threaten the integrity of the new NATURA 2000 site. Illegal shooting remains a serious issue in the Akrotiri area and the permitting of daily shoots in certain seasons in certain parts of the peninsula needs to be reviewed. There is also a need for closer and more effective cooperation between SBA and Republic authorities on poaching issues. Unmanaged access to sensitive areas (including regular illegal training of hunting dogs) continues to be a problem, especially with trailer parking and off-road vehicles. In addition to the above, reports of turtle deaths on the Akrotiri peninsula and the whole SBA coast, reinforce the need for an integrated management plan for the area that will deal with all species and habitats.

We welcomed the July 07 *Policy statement on the management of Natura 2000 sites in the SBAs*, which set down excellent guidelines for protection of Natura 2000 sites in the SBAs, enshrining the principle of ‘appropriate assessment’ for projects. Nevertheless in 2009 a number of damaging developments went ahead without appropriate assessment, despite the Policy Statement. While there has been no notable repeat of this alarming situation, there have been damaging and uncontrolled interventions into the rare dune system on the East of the peninsula and there are proposals for massive solar park developments, road and golf developments as well as proposals for desalination pipeline and other pipelines passing through the salt lake. Such proposals need to be examined in a strategic way within the context of a comprehensive management plan with clear priority given to the need to preserve the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Bird strike monitoring and mitigation (recommendations 1 & 5):

The programme of flight path monitoring surveys for the antenna installation is ongoing. This study, following on from similar surveys in the autumns of 07, 08 and 09 should provide useful data for mitigation of potential bird strike problems (of relevance to recommendation 5). The SBA conservation team continue monitoring of *Grus virgo* (Demoiselle Crane) movements in the Akrotiri area during the crucial August 15th to September 15th staging period.

Efforts to build on the 10-day preliminary on-site mortality survey carried out during autumn 06 remain stalled. No formula has been found for more systematic or long-term mortality monitoring, as the SBAA insist access to the aerial sites is problematic and can only be permitted for a handful of days each month, with only one or two days prior notice – making it impossible to set up a monitoring program. This means the killing potential of the antenna installations remains an unknown, hindering mitigation efforts.

Environmental & cultural education (recommendation 6):

On the positive side the Akrotiri Environmental Education and Information Centre (AEEIC) (recommendation 113/04) continues to thrive. The AEEIC is part of the formal environmental education network of the Republic and land has been acquired to establish a permanent base for the AEEIC. The centre attracted over 10,000 visitors over the past twelve months, most of these schoolchildren.

We call on the committee to press for the immediate completion and swift implementation of a comprehensive management plan for the site, the strict adoption of ‘appropriate assessment’ procedures for all proposed developments and for a renewed effort to fully assess and mitigate for the bird strike risk posed by the Antenna installations.

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

The issue has been brought to your attention as a result of the mega antenna installed by the Bases which posed a hazard for avifauna. We expect that BirdLife Cyprus will be informing you about the situation. Meanwhile however, additional threats have developed in other respects:

2.1 A dirt road is planned to be upgraded all along Akrotiri coast, which will affect not only the Salt lake and its birdlife but the sand dunes along the coast. Our position is that no development should be allowed until the area receives the equivalent to an SPA/SCI designation (as the Bases are not part of the EU they operate an equivalence regime), the management plan for the area of the Natura 2000 site is complete, and the appropriate environmental impact assessments carried out.

2.2 A difference developed last year between the Bases Administration and local NGOs concerning the high number of turtle deaths off Tunnel beach, Akrotiri and the lack of adequate monitoring and protection. We believe the Bases have now been convinced of the size of the problem and the high number of turtles in the area, but, pending the outcome of a long overdue study, we are not convinced that adequate protection measures are in place.

We ask you to request the Bases to provide a report on both situations.