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**CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS**

**GROUP OF SPECIALISTS – EUROPEAN DIPLOMA OF PROTECTED AREAS
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Future of the European Diploma

*Document prepared by the Directorate of Culture and
Cultural and Natural Heritage*

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Following the decision taken in 2010 by the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma of Protected Areas to hold a discussion at its next meeting on the future of the diploma and how it can be used more effectively, the Secretariat has drafted a working document, comprising:

- the Secretariat's views
- the final declaration of latest Seminar of managers of diploma-holding areas, held in 2005 at the Thayatal national park in Austria
- an extract from the report by Mr Hervé Lethier on prospects for the development of the European Diploma (2007) (PE-S-DE (2007) 13
- Comments from members of the Group

I. The Secretariat's views

Introduction

The European Diploma is a living and much sought-after instrument requiring a high level of commitment by both managers of diploma-holding areas and the authorities responsible for those areas. It is both a technical and political tool encompassing the values of the Council of Europe.

During the 46 years since it was set up in 1965, it has enabled substantive work to be carried out in the field of the protection and meticulous monitoring of sites of outstanding value in terms of biological, geological and landscape diversity and which are managed in an exemplary manner.

Nonetheless, the European Diploma needs to evolve for the following reasons:

- It has not developed to the same extent in all countries
- The results obtained should provide richer input to the work carried out in other Bern Convention groups of experts by contributing innovative ideas and experiences on nature conservation and the management of natural resources in a sustainable development approach
- Working methods could be further streamlined

State of the network

The network of diploma-holding areas currently includes 71 areas in 26 countries.

Terms of reference of the group

The group examines the candidatures submitted by governments:

- expresses an opinion in the European value of the applicant area
- decides on carrying out an on-site expert appraisal

It examines the expert reports drafted by independent experts:

- following submission of an application
- as part of the European diploma renewal process
- in the event of a serious threat or significant damage to a diploma-holding area

It examines the annual reports that the authorities responsible for diploma-holding areas are required to submit each year.

It makes proposals regarding the issues to be discussed at the seminars of managers of diploma-holding areas.

Recent changes to the regulations

In 2003, in view of the rise in the number of diploma-holding areas and the limited resources allocated to this activity, it was decided to simplify the system of pre-renewal visits.

Article 9 of the Regulations gave rise to the following interpretation:

“Expert appraisals prior to the renewal of the European Diploma, other than those relating to the first renewal, will not be organised systematically. The necessity of making a new on-the-spot appraisal will be decided by the competent committee in the light of the current situation of the area concerned and the content of the most recent annual reports.”

The regulations (Resolution (98)29) were modified in 2008 following a decision by the Committee of Ministers (Resolution Resdip (2008)1): the main changes concern the committee responsible for the European Diploma activities – now the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention – and the period of validity of the European Diploma: 10 years instead of the previous period of 5 years (the Diploma is awarded for 5 years and then renewed for 10).

Some suggestions for the future:

- Encourage candidatures from countries which do not yet have any diploma-holding areas;
- be more selective regarding acceptance of candidature files. Carry out a study aimed at analysing the biological, geological and landscape diversity already represented in the network, identify areas of European importance not yet present and make proposals in this respect;
- study the possibility of spacing out annual reports through submission every 2 years;
- when reading the annual reports and expert appraisals, identify a problem or priority issue common to several areas in order to suggest common applicable solutions;
- hold the seminars of managers of diploma-holding areas at more regular intervals;
- enhance the profile of the Diploma both at Council of Europe level (website, updating brochures) and manager level;
- organise Bern Convention meetings in the diploma-holding areas which are key sites of biodiversity and often faced with problems dealt with by the Convention, such as climate change, invasive alien species, the biodiversity of European islands;
- work in co-operation with the Group of Experts responsible for protected areas and ecological networks and with other Council of Europe conventions dealing with landscape and the

cultural heritage (European Landscape Convention, Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe, Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society);

- ensure better co-ordination with the other awards/forms of recognition granted to areas holding the European Diploma.

II. Final declaration of the Thayatal seminar (bilingual)

The participants in the Seminar of Managers holding the European Diploma of Protected Areas,

Thanking the Austrian authorities, particularly to the director of the Thayatal National Park, for their invitation and warm hospitality and the Council of Europe for the excellent arrangements for the organisation of the seminar;

Expressing their gratitude to the Czech authorities for their contribution to the seminar;

Welcoming the fact that the Council of Europe took the initiative of celebrating the European Diploma's 40th anniversary on the occasion of the seminar;

Highlighting the usefulness of such meetings, which provide an opportunity to share information and experience, which is of key importance in ensuring that the network of areas holding the European Diploma operates effectively, and hoping that such meetings will be organised periodically;

Acknowledging that, since it was introduced in 1965, the European Diploma of Protected Areas has played a major role in preserving natural and semi-natural areas and some of Europe's most outstanding landscapes;

Aware that the European Diploma is not only an acknowledgement of the exceptional quality of an area and its exemplary management, but also a tool for solving and preventing problems relating to its protection;

Aware that the European Diploma has reached different stages of development in different countries;

Welcoming the fact that this award has been a living and sought-after instrument for the last 40 years;

Recognising the role of areas holding the European Diploma in ensuring the promotion and the active preservation of biological, geological and landscape diversity and the sustainable use of natural resources;

Acknowledging that the European Diploma represents an important contribution to the Pan-European Ecological Network;

Recognising the invaluable work that those responsible for areas holding the European Diploma have done, sometimes in very difficult circumstances;

Hereby declare that:

- given the well-established benefits it has brought, the European Diploma must remain a key instrument for protecting exceptionally important sites in Europe and continue to develop in co-operation and interaction with other networks of protected areas;
- the European Diploma should be extended, as a priority, to the countries that have not yet submitted applications and to transfrontier zones;
- the high standard of requirements, in particular the supervisory system attached to the Diploma, which is its key asset and what makes it original, must be maintained, and the necessary means made available by the Council of Europe;
- the European Diploma should receive increased political and financial support from governments and where appropriate from other interested donors; areas holding the Diploma should be provided with financial and human resources commensurate with the commitment that governments enter into on submitting applications;
- all protected areas and other “more ordinary” natural areas should benefit from the knowledge and skills of those responsible for areas holding the Diploma, which serve as reference territories, in the true sense of the term, for the long-term study of population and habitat changes, good managerial practice in the framework of sustainable development;

Single out the following guidelines and principles relating to the four themes dealt with during the Seminar:

Theme 1: The new challenges facing area authorities (climate change, return of large carnivores, invasive species, etc)

- Assist managers facing challenges stemming from economic and ecological globalisation;
- Address the conservation challenge represented by invasive alien species, particularly in the light of the work carried out under other instruments, such as the Bern Convention and its European Strategy on Invasive Alien Species;
- Take into account the work of the Group of experts on large carnivores of the Bern Convention, especially the action plans.
In particular, implement common strategies in all European States, draw up functional models aimed to guarantee the coexistence of large carnivores and agricultural and zootechnical activities, by promoting awareness of the ecological value of large carnivores and on seeking collaboration with breeders, farmers and all administrations concerned;
- Address the problem posed by the return of land to private owners particularly by providing a system of compensation for managerial efforts in line with sustainable use of natural resources and landscapes preservation;
- Provide methodological support for the search for new sources of funding among public or private donors sponsors and facilitate access to these sources;
- Take steps to ensure that regulations (concerning land use, tree felling, etc) are more strictly observed in order to reduce the growing pressures on areas holding the Diploma;

- Pay more attention to certain taxonomic groups often neglected, such as invertebrates which play a key functional role in ecosystems;
- Encourage use of common principles for the recognition of different types of protected areas;

Theme 2 – Partnership actions

- Use the European Diploma to promote institutional, technical, scientific and financial partnerships with all the public and private parties concerned in order to ensure and/or improve the functioning of the area holding the Diploma;
- See certain basic instruments, such as management plans, as the fruit of work done in partnership, requiring a participatory process and provide Diploma sites with such plans as stipulated in the Regulations for the European Diploma;
- Reinforce partnership concerning information management on Diploma areas, by updating the existing data; consider the possibility of including in an information system both the annual reports and the on-the-spot appraisal visits;
- Develop partnership with other networks, in order to establish a common trunk of information;

Theme 3 – Transfrontier co-operation and management issues

- Strengthen co-operation between transfrontier areas holding the Diploma in the light of their natural geographical, ecological, human and historical links, thus helping to achieve the Council of Europe's objective of bringing peoples closer together;
- Consider awarding more frequently a single Diploma to transfrontier areas forming a whole;
- Ensure that co-operation is not confined to meetings and exchanges but is enshrined in more formal and equitable partnership arrangements (bilateral agreements, twinning, charters, treaties, ...);
- Harmonise the status of transfrontier areas where possible, so that they receive equivalent protection on the highest possible level;
- Consider, in certain cases, setting up a single management body for transfrontier areas;
- Plan the removal of fences and other obstacles to animal movement or, failing that, create passageways for fauna;
- Strengthen co-operation with those responsible for regional instruments that apply to transfrontier areas (Alpine Convention, Carpathian Convention, Barcelona Convention, Helsinki Convention, ...);
- Promote co-operation with such initiatives as “Green Belt” and the “Cantabria-Pyrenees-Alps Great Mountain Corridor”, whose aim is to establish functional ecological corridors and thus contribute to overcoming Europe's historic divides;

Theme 4 – Public relations and marketing issues

- Fulfil and harmonise an information, awareness-raising and educational role, targeting the various levels and different population groups, thus helping to ensure that the protected area is accepted by civil society, has a good image and is seen as attractive;
- Highlight the special features of each Diploma site as well as its assets;
- Make arrangements for tourism in consultation with all stakeholders, particularly tourism professionals, taking account of the area's environmental assets and vulnerability;
- Consider revenue from tourism merely as supplementary income to finance granted by public authorities.

III. Extract of the report by Mr Hervé Lethier on the prospects for the development of the European Diploma

Guiding principles

The conclusions that follow are based on a vision of the Diploma which combines the outstanding heritage value of a site with exemplary and comprehensive management of the biological, cultural and landscape elements present there, consistent with the sustainable development criteria referred to above.

They form a road-map to ensure that the Diploma becomes a real seal of approval, bearing witness to the practice of exemplary and comprehensive management of the natural, cultural and landscape heritage of Europe, inspired by the ideas and principles of the Council of Europe and upholding its values.

Clarifying the scope of the diploma:

The close links between the ECHR and the European environment, in the sense referred to above, should be mentioned in the regulations of the diploma, to ensure full recognition of the latter's established contribution to the preservation of those rights.

This clarification is consistent with developments in international law and reflects political trends clearly observed in recent years.

The diploma should have as a specific aim the protection of biological, cultural and landscape diversity as components of the general interest guaranteed by the ECHR.

A European heritage diploma (EHD):

The EHD would be awarded to "sites", monuments or protected areas:

- whose outstanding European value is recognised in terms of their natural, cultural **and/or** landscape aspects;
- **and** if their management is exemplary from an economic, social **and** environmental point of view.

The value of a site would be assessed using a grid comprising several criteria, tying in with the spirit of the Council of Europe conventions in this field (Bern, Florence and Faro).

The quality of management would be assessed with regard to the values, ideals and principles promoted by the ECHR and its contribution to sustainable development in the countries in question.

A European Heritage Site Network (EHSN):

This would be set up by merging the European *institutional* heritage network and the *territorial* network of diploma-holding areas, with the aim of:

- promoting the values, ideals and principles of the Council of Europe;
- facilitating sustainable development in Europe;
- developing co-operation between countries and site managers;
- contributing to the preservation of the pan-European natural, cultural and landscape heritage;
- offering a forum for discussion, information and communication on the management of this heritage.

Adjusting resources:

The following recommendations are designed to optimise current Council of Europe resources.

They are also aimed at promoting greater involvement of civil society in the work to set up the European Heritage Network (territorial and functional dimensions) and ensure co-ordination between the managers of the sites which are part of that network (institutional dimension).

Two institutional measures are proposed:

- the setting up of a **European Heritage Centre (EHC)**, responsible for the administration of the three aforementioned technical conventions (Bern, Faro and Florence) and the administration and development of the EHSN; the administrative and financial resources assigned to the Council of Europe for cultural, natural and landscape heritage should be channelled to and shared out within the EHC;
- the setting up of a **Heritage Committee (HC)**; this would replace the current committees responsible for providing the Committee of Ministers with all the opinions and proposals regarding the award (or withdrawal) of the diploma and, in general, all measures to preserve and enhance the European natural, cultural and landscape heritage, in liaison with the experts. This committee could operate in separate configurations (natural heritage, cultural heritage, landscapes), depending on the matters to be addressed;

Two measures of a financial nature are recommended:

In this regard, it should be borne in mind that there are at present no particular financial mechanisms able to meet the needs generated by the proposed adjustments; it might therefore prove necessary to approach private¹ and public² institutional donors to seek the resources required.

¹ Corporate foundations (e.g.: Gaz de France, EDF, Total, BP, Elf), private foundations (e.g.: Fondation Prince Albert II de Monaco), intervention funds (e.g.: National Geographic's Conservation Trust, the IUCN Netherlands funding programmes), sponsors, etc.

It should also be borne in mind that the Council of Europe has its own internal funding mechanisms which could partially address these needs;³ it was, moreover, beyond the scope of this report to go into this in any greater detail, although reflection on this matter does not present any particular difficulties and could usefully draw on existing formulas.⁴

- The setting up of a **Small Grant Fund for the Conservation of the European Heritage (SGFCEH)**; this Fund, designed to help the sustainable management of diploma-holding sites, would primarily be financed by voluntary contributions from members; it would be used, on recommendations from the HC, to award small grants to the most disadvantaged countries Europe-wide, to help them honour their commitments under the three Conventions; this Fund would be administered by the HC, in liaison with the Committee of Ministers, in accordance with regulations which would need to be drawn up;
- the creation of a **European Heritage Foundation (EHF)**, open to all donors, private in particular, and multilateral; this Foundation would take action in promoting the preservation of the natural, cultural and landscape heritage of outstanding pan-European value, by facilitating ambitious pilot projects and programmes going beyond the legal obligations of member states under international law and promoting co-operation between countries. It would be managed by a Foundation Board (**FB**) comprising, alongside the Council of Europe, interested donors, and could operate, for part of its capital, in the form of a trust fund.⁵

² European Union, governments and development aid agencies in the countries of Europe (AFD, DGID, GTZ, SIDA, DANIDA, FINIDA, DDC), World bank Group, EBRD, Global Environment Facility, etc.

³ The Council's own funds, the Development Bank, etc

⁴ World Heritage Fund, the Ramsar Convention Small Grants Fund, Small Grant Fund/UNDP, the small initiatives programme of the French Global Environment Facility, etc

⁵ The Council of Europe already has some experience with such intervention funds in the youth sector.

IV. Comments of the members of the Group of Specialists

Mr Felice Cappelluti

General remarks

- The European Diploma for Protected Areas (EDPA) has given a major contribution to the knowledge and appreciation of protected areas and to the construction of European identity. Can continue to give it. But in 50 years the world has changed, the challenges have changed (fortunately also because some objectives have been achieved) and therefore the aims and means of Diploma should be adapted.
- The spread of the EDPA is not homogeneous in Europe. The concentration of awarded areas probably does not reflect the distribution of environmental value.
- In last 50 years the differences between European countries have declined but not disappeared. Probably the Diploma should take into account these differences and goals and instruments should be differentiated.

New challenges

- We need to relate the objectives of the Diploma to the global challenges that have emerged over the past 20 years. First of all we have to shift from nature conservation to biodiversity conservation; and from protection and promotion of the individual area to protection and promotion of the network of areas.
- It could be also important introducing the concept of ecosystem services. The areas of EDPA should become areas of excellence where you experience the most advanced tools for the protection of biodiversity (such as the Payments for Ecosystem Services - PES)
- An other challenge is to associate the nature conservation with protection of landscape, in the sense outlined by the Florence Convention. In this sense, concepts as citizen participation, perception and cultural place identity are essential.
- The concept of “place identity” is very important for strengthening of European cultural union, because the European identity must be presented as something that promotes unity in difference.
- We need to continue giving greater support to awarding of transboundary areas.
- In order to promote the spread of EDPA areas in the Countries that do not have, it could be useful, from one hand, imagine some kind of incentives that may, for example, optimize the use of the trademark for tourist purposes (agreements with networks of tour operators?); from another hand, EDPA should look for a link with MEAs (CBD Programme of Work for Protected Areas; CMS, for areas that are on the flyways). In this way, Countries would find more interesting and convenient to support areas of EDPA if this was useful also for the implementation of other MEAs.

About the annual reporting

- The different and new objectives should be reflected in the annual reporting. Some topics should/could have more space: the relationship with the network (Natura 2000 and Emerald, above all); the landscape dimension in the sense of the Convention of Florence (place identity); the public participation; the evaluation of ecosystem services.

- The report might become biennial. I would decrease burdens whether for the Protected Areas and for the CoE.
- The report should take greater account of the progresses made, even small, rather than of the state of existing situation.

Mr Henri Jaffeux

1) Comments

- The 40th anniversary of European Diploma for Protected Areas (EDPA) in the national park of Thayatal, in Austria had been a big and beautiful event. The wealth of the discussions and the enthusiasm of the participants had feeds the hope of a new start for the diploma. Five years later, only 4 new zones were distinguished. The impression is that the diploma is in loss of speed. It is little known by the networks of national protected areas and of the competent national authorities. It attracts few new candidates.
- It against of this report, it is necessary to say how much, today, the protected areas, quite confused status, establish a fundamental element of the strategies of preservation at the national, regional and world level. They establish the cornerstone of the preservation in situ of the biological diversity of Rio Convention and several conventions and European instruments (Berne / Emeraude, directives UE / Natura 2000, Ramsar, ecological networks, etc.). So, among 20 strategic objectives adopted to Nagoya, implementation of a network of protected areas 17 % of the terrestrial elements and the fresh water and 10 % of the coastal and marine elements (against respectively 13 % and 5 % at present) was adopted. It is to say how much the national authorities and with them all the actors of the creation and the management of the protected areas are going to have to double effort before 2020.
- We thus see how much an instrument as the European Diploma of the protected spaces could accompany this movement with the member states of the Council of Europe, themselves concerned to this objective. To recognize the patrimonial value and the quality of the management of existing protected areas can encourage to the creation of new areas. He can establish an effect of training and generate a competition between administrators. Three advantages of this diploma can be advanced :

– it is a label which managers of the areas concerned can apply for freely through their governments ;

– it does not depend on any international conventions or directives. It is a useful addition to other forms of protected area status ;

– it is a unifying instrument recognised all over Europe and for all types of protected areas.

2) That it would be necessary to make. Some propositions to be discussed

- to act to increase significantly and quickly the number of awarded a diploma protected areas, that they involve countries which already have awarded a diploma zones or, of course, countries which have no it another (about twenty). Rather than to wait for

- candidates, throw every year a call for candidates targeted in sight, in particular, to diversify the network (see below) and to structure it gradually.
- Incite member states to the constitution of national committee of the European Diploma of areas protected to promote and spread the information about the diploma, issue appeals for candidates, select the candidates and be relays with the CoE.
 - Diversify the network:
 - 1) Incite the other types of protected areas that the national parks and the reserves (at present members of the majority party) to apply (Sites Emerald and Natura 2000, sites Ramsar and quite other status recognized by the national authorities) ;
 - 2) Organize the cover of the network according to the European biogeographical regions ;
 - 3) Watch the representation according to various entries to be defined (marine environment, forests, wet zones, alpine ecosystems, rivers, tundra, etc.) ;
 - 4) Watch to take into account the criterion of the ecological continuity between the protected space and its environment, during the examination of the new candidate and the renewals ;
 - 5) Encourage the delivery of a unique diploma for cross-border protected areas.
 - Investigate the possibility to give a prize financed by the sponsorship in every new awarded a diploma protected areas. In the same order of idea, investigate the possibility of creating an European foundation of the natural heritage.
 - Change the name of the diploma in " Diploma of the natural heritage of the Council of Europe ".
 - In house in the CoE, make attribute more means to the team to manage the attribution of the diploma.

Mr Nikolay Sobolev

My suggestion is to improve the integrity of various PA systems.

Ecological Networks and the PEEN is the first make the basis of the territorial conservation. The Emerald/Natura-2000 Network provide PEEN with Core Areas so its elements should be as numerous as possible. The EDPA should become the nomination of a higher level than ordinary Core Areas. For this reason I support much Henri's proposal to rename the Diploma as Diploma of the natural heritage of the Council of Europe.

We can stimulate responsible persons for PA management by offering them a benefit from having been nominated. I expect the solution may be in implementation of the voluntary certification. On the other hand, it would be optimal discussing the approach with businessmen.

Ms Ulla Steer

General remarks

Since the foundation of the European Diploma of Protected Areas (EDoPA) in 1965 there have been different selection criteria for European Diploma areas in diverse and in some cases more extended European and global networks. Due to the MAB-Programme network of Biosphere Reserves created by the UNESCO in 1971, as one example the focus lay on research and future sustainable regional development. The Natura 2000 network conduces to the conservation of the European flora, fauna and habitats (category A of the EDoPA) like the EDoPA provides. The important and essential evaluation of the areas (after EDoPA every five years, newly every ten years) is accomplished by the Biosphere Reserves (evaluation every ten years) and by the Natura 2000 network (report of condition every six years).

We appreciate the EDoPA because it covers exemplary areas. The aim of protection of species and biotopes is pursued in detail as well as the sustainable socioeconomic development up to education, which is still essential in our opinion. Moreover in our experience affects the 'strong' control and conditions during the renewal a positive development of the areas.

According to the above mentioned networks and the fact that there were given only 13 new EDoPA since 2000 it is questionable if the EDoPA is still usable with its current contents or if the Diploma would make a better contribute with a modified an adjusted agenda to the conservation of biodiversity than the national state of conservation already does.

1. Are you content with having about 70 ED areas across Europe? Should we be more actively encouraging a flow of new areas? How can we encourage a better spread of ED sites across Europe?

The Diploma must not be only an additive label for National Parks, Biosphere Reserves, Nature Reserves and other protected areas. It rather should focus on outstanding European protected areas, which achieve the extensive and optionally adjusted criteria (see below) of the Council of Europe. Although the number of European Diploma areas in Europe is too low, the quality of the areas should be the most important criteria of the selection process. Until now there are 24 (or 26) European states with approval.

At an average every country contains nearly three European Diploma sites. Also with the basis of highest requirements more areas can possibly get approval. In 20 European states are no areas awarded with the Diploma. Based on modified criteria it would be helpful to create an *Open Register of capable areas* in collaboration with experts (see question 2).

Therefore it would be the mission of the Council of Europe to approach the states and their authorities with the intent to make the advantages of an application accessible to them. In our opinion the EDoPA loses its reputation and publicity in the European states, it is a fact concerning Germany. An appreciation and reorientation of the EDoPA and the publicity must be given by the Council of Europe if renewals and new approvals are aimed. It is necessary for states, which already contain European Diploma areas and for applying ones.

2. Are the criteria for approval of new sites, or the renewal of existing sites, still appropriate or are there changes that we should like to see?

To install an efficient network of European Diploma areas an increase of approvals sites is required. Please keep the Natura 2000 network in mind.

Based on current criteria of labelling of the EDoPA, in Germany Nature Parks and well-managed, large-scale Nature Conservation Areas are potential recipients.

In our opinion the adjustment of criteria should support the Decade of biodiversity and the implementation of the strategic plan 2011-2020 (COP 10 of the Convention on Biological Diversity) in order to the further development of conservation areas. Following criteria additional to the current ones should be considered:

- large-scale sites (in our opinion the major focus should be on large-scale sites because of landscape protection)
- contribution to the aim of approaching a loss rate of natural habitats (including forests) to nearly zero
- contribution to the construction of a system of protected areas concerning aim 11 of the strategy (17% of the terrestrial part, 10% of coastal and marine parts).
Until now it deemed the requirement that the conservation status must exist already. If this requirement persists, European Diploma areas will not enrich the system of protected areas. Due to the fact it is essential that non-protected areas are able to get approval.
- contribution to the protection of species (aim 12 of the strategy: stop of extinction of endangered species until 2020)
- contribution to the climate change and climate adaption
- focus on trans-border conservation areas.

The existing 71 European Diploma areas should be analyzed in regard to the future adjustment. Furthermore the above mentioned modified criteria must be considered by the creation of the Open Register of capable areas.

3. Annual reporting process: Are you happy with the present situation or would you like to see changes?

We would prefer biennial reporting.