Implementation of directive 92/43/EEC on habitats

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Jonas SJÖSTEDT (EUL/NGL, S) on the implementation of the 1992 Habitats Directive. It was critical of the fact that the Community's nature conservation legislation was not yet fully operational as a result of the failure of Member States to implement the directive, which was now more than 8 years old. The Commission was urged to continue to use the appropriate legal enforcement means within its powers to ensure proper implementation of the directive and to act speedily whenever it detected a breach of the Member States' obligations. Speedier progress was also needed on site designation for the Natura 2000 network of special areas of conservation, including those of the countries applying for accession, and the deadline of June 2004 should be respected. The report urged the Member States to see nature conservation as a policy area, a source of economic potential and a right to be enjoyed by future generations. It stressed that results could be achieved only with the active cooperation of citizens in their roles as landowners and users, and called for improved mechanisms for public participation. The committee also urged the Commission to emphasise the availability of existing financial instruments, such as the structural funds, the ERDF and the EAGGF, to promote biodiversity conservation and the implementation of the Habitats Directive. It suggested that such funds could be used, for example, for providing conservation advice and training for farmers and fishermen and incentives for farmers using environmentally-friendly farm practices and for afforestation of farmland. Other measures proposed by the committee included the drafting of a guide on how to interpret parts of the Habitats Directive, to be translated into the official EU languages and those of the applicant countries, the publication by the Commission of an annual report on the effects of the common agricultural policy on habitats and species throughout the EU and a call for the EIB to prepare and make public environmental impact assessment reports on projects in the applicant countries prior to their approval.