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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE  
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Standing Committee**  
27<sup>th</sup> meeting

Strasbourg, 26-29 November 2007

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**On-the-spot appraisal**  
**Planned Motorway Vc (A5 Autocesta Beli Manastir**  
**to Osijek ) across the Drava Marshlands**  
**Slavonia (Croatia)**

Comment by the NGO on the  
Report of the on-the-spot appraisal  
(5-6 June 2007)

*Document presented by*  
*Green Action*

## **GREEN ACTION COMMENTS ON THE BERN CONVENTION REPORT ON THE DRAVA WETLANDS CROSSING OF THE CORRIDOR Vc MOTORWAY**

Green Action would like to thank Mr Len Wyatt for his diligent work on the report of the on-the-spot appraisal of the planned Motorway Vc's impacts on the Drava Wetlands. We regret that Croatian Highways did not provide a translation of all the relevant parts of the Environmental Impact Assessment, as this would have made it much easier for him to assess the extent to which a suitable assessment had been carried out. We also regret that the EIA was not written so as to clearly enable identification of those species that are found in the Drava Wetlands separately to those found in Kopacki Rit Nature Park, as this has clearly made the assessment of the impacts and necessary mitigation measures more difficult.

### **Notes on uncertainties expressed in the text**

While we do not have access to much more information than has been presented so far, we can make two specific comments on parts of the text where uncertainties appear:

- p.3 - we are able to confirm that the Ministry of Culture is supporting the proposal to declare the Drava-Mura corridor a Biosphere Reserve. The State Institute for Nature Conservation (expert body of the Ministry) is conducting a project for developing background materials and necessary preparations for creating a Biosphere Reserve.
- p.23 - we are able to confirm that no Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has been carried out for the Corridor Vc, as there is still no SEA legislation in Croatia.

### **Comments on the conclusions and recommendations of the report**

We accept and welcome the conclusions and recommendations, which are reasonable given the amount of information made available and the area of expertise of the report's author.

We note also that due to the amount of time between our original complaint and the present day, some of our proposals such as examining the possibility of combining Corridor Vc and the Osijek Western Bypass, and the carrying out of a new EIA, are no longer appropriate.

We fully agree with Recommendations 1-3, and stress the need for their full implementation. From Recommendations 4 to 7 we would particularly like to emphasise Nos. 6 and 7 on improving access to information and on presenting information on different projects within the same area: Poor access to information has been a consistent problem during our engagement with this project, for example during our first visit to Osijek it appeared that many people, including some journalists writing about the topic, did not know that there were two separate projects being undertaken and confused the Western Bypass and Corridor Vc projects.

### **Our conclusions and recommendations**

We very much hope that the measures recommended in the report will be implemented and that they will be sufficient to ensure the survival of species living near the Drava river crossing. We also hope that they will lead to improved communication between the parties interested in similar projects in the future so that adjustments to projects can be made at an earlier stage.

However it is regrettable that the Bern Convention has not been able to make an assessment on the quality of the EIA for the Corridor Vc and that of the Croatian EIA legislation in regard to fulfilling Croatia's obligations under the Bern Convention, as we believe that this is a persistent weakness that may lead to similar situations occurring again.

*We recommend that:*

- The Croatian authorities implement all of the recommendations from the report compiled by Mr Len Wyatt.
- The Croatian government fully aligns Croatian EIA legislation with that of the EU as soon as possible, including introducing Strategic Environmental Assessment legislation.

- The Bern Convention Standing Committee monitors Croatia's progress in aligning its EIA legislation with that of the EU and incorporating features necessary to ensure the protection of species included in the Bern Convention.
- The Bern Convention Standing Committee continues to monitor Croatia's efforts to protect the Drava Wetlands as a flood barrier dam project is apparently being developed, in addition to the motorway and Western Bypass of Osijek, which may create further fragmentation of the Wetlands.