

Strasbourg, 26 August 2022

T-PVS/Files(2022)63

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

42nd meeting
Strasbourg, 28 November - 2 December 2022

Open File: 2004/2

**Wind farms in Balchik and Kaliakra –Via
Pontica
(Bulgaria)**

- REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT -

*Document prepared by
the Ministry of Environment and Water of Bulgaria*



REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND WATER

Wind farms planned near Balchik and Kaliakra – Via Pontica (Bulgaria) – Progress since December 2021

26 August 2022

1. Introduction

The Case ‘Windfarms planned near Balchik and Kaliakra – Via Pontica (Bulgaria)’ has been monitored by the Bureau and Standing Committee of the Bern Convention for years and, as part of this process, Recommendation No 130 (2007) has been issued.

At its 37th meeting held in December 2017, taking into account the judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union, delivered on 14 January 2016 on case C-141/14 (Kaliakra), the Standing Committee assigned to the Secretariat to organize an on-the-spot appraisal (OSA) to assess the need to update Recommendation 130 (2007).

At its 38th meeting held in November 2018 the Standing Committee adopted of Recommendation No 200 (2018) on planned wind farms near Balchik and Kaliakra and other wind farms on the Via Pontica (Bulgaria) route, which is based on the results and the recommendations formulated by the on-site mission held in May 2018.

At the 41th meeting held in November 2021 the Standing Committee, requested Bulgarian authorities to report for the 2nd Bureau meeting in 2022 on the progress in the implementation of Recommendation No. 200 (2018).

2. Implementation of Recommendation No 200 (2018).

Recommendation to the Bulgarian Government:

1. *The comprehensive independent assessment of the impact of operational windfarms in the Kaliakra area which was recommended by the Bern Convention Standing Committee in 2015 (amplifying paragraph 5 of Recommendation No. 130 of 2007) should be undertaken without delay, according to scientifically appropriate methods to be agreed in advance. It should include information from the current collision mortality monitoring but should also address other impacts such as displacement, barrier effects, disturbance and habitat change; and it should arrange to draw on collaborative sharing of information between windfarm operators, regional authorities, NGOs, academic researchers and others. An interim report of the results should be transmitted to the Bern Convention Bureau before February 2019, and a final report before August 2019;*

2. *A broader regime for on-going monitoring and assessment of potential impacts of the Kaliakra area windfarms during their operation should be developed, ensuring that it inter alia:*
- *follows scientifically appropriate methods agreed in advance,*
 - *addresses all types of potential impacts, including collisions, disturbance, displacement, barrier effects and habitat changes,*
 - *includes observations at both windfarm sites and comparable areas with no windfarm developments, so as to provide 'control' comparisons,*
 - *is coordinated across all the Kaliakra installations,*
 - *is undertaken in conjunction with research by NGOs, supported by data-sharing agreements,*
 - *takes the opportunity to undertake related research where it would be appropriate and cost-effective to associate this with the field efforts already being made on monitoring and assessment,*
 - *makes information about the methods and systems used available in a form which would allow these to be replicated at other windfarm sites elsewhere,*
 - *feeds results and insights (through the authorities) into national processes for planning and assessment of future developments;*

Implementation:

Implemented. Bulgarian government has provided to the Standing Committee by its progress reports from 19 February 2020, 23 July 2020, and 23 November 2020 the following reports elaborated under contract No Д-30-45 from 10.06.2019 by the independent expert with professional qualifications and practical experience in analysing available data on bird species and expertise in field studies of bird species, as follows:

1. Report on the Methodology for Assessing accessible information on the Impacts of Wind Energy Development on Birds in the Region of Kaliakra, Bulgaria,
2. Report on the Methodology for a monitoring of the Impacts of Wind Energy Development on Birds in the Region of Kaliakra, Bulgaria, and
3. Final Report on the Impacts of Wind Energy Development on Birds in the Region of Kaliakra, Bulgaria.

3. *Windfarm operators and other land owners, managers and authorities should explore options for creating conservation gains for migratory birds and habitats in or around the Kaliakra area (e.g. through habitat creation/restoration and management investments, designation of additional protected areas, etc), as a way of aiming partially to offset the risks and/or damage introduced by the completed windfarm developments, and/or in any event to contribute to agreed conservation priorities;*

Implementation:

Measures have been taken to improve the conservation status of the steppe habitats in the Kaliakra region. Strict bans were introduced for plowing and building in the areas of distribution of priority habitat type 62C0 *Ponto-Sarmatic steppes in Natura 2000 sites. The project for restoration of the priority steppe habitat in the region is under implementation - Contract № 12578 / 24.04.2019 between the Municipality of Kavarna and EMEPA. The territorial scope of the project includes the Natura 2000 site BG0000573 'Kompleks Kaliakra' in the boundaries of the Municipality of Kavarna.

In the period from 01.07.2021 to 20.04.2022, the following types of works were carried out under the project:

- Regular cleaning and mowing of the plots occupied by habitat type 62C0* Ponto-Sarmatian steppes in the lands of Bulgarevo and Sveti Nikola villages was carried out in order to remove the ruderal vegetation and support the self-recovery processes.

- A methodology has been elaborated for the restoration of the priority habitat type 62C0* Ponto-Sarmatian steppes.
- Biological material was collected from typical and edicator plant species of the habitat.
- The test plots in the boundaries of the field of Bulgarevo village were cleaned and prepared for planting rooted plants.
- The rooted plants obtained from the seeds and cuttings collected in the spring and autumn of 2021 were transferred to the field and post-planting work is carried out, according to the climatic conditions.
- In April 2022, a final informational meeting for the implementation of the project took place.
- A total of 10 information boards have been prepared with information on the restrictions and recommendations for the land use in the areas of distribution of habitat type 62C0* Ponto-Sarmatian steppes in Natura 2000 site 'Kompleks Kaliakra'.

A call was launched under the Operational Program "Environment 2014 - 2020" - BG16M1OP002-3.022 named 'Improving the environmental protection status of steppe natural habitats by purchasing land'.

The purpose of the call is to ensure permanent preservation and improvement of the conservation status of priority habitat type 62C0* Ponto-Sarmatian steppes, by purchasing properties of individuals and legal entities in Natura 2000 site BG0000573 "Kompleks Kaliakra". The procedure has a direct contribution to the objectives of priority axis 3 of the operational program "Environment 2014-2020", which during the current program period is fully aimed at implementing measures from the National Prioritised Action Framework (NPAF) for Natura 2000 for the multi-annual financial period of the European Union 2014-2020.

This is a pilot procedure, and its results will be analyzed and taken into account when announcing following procedure for purchase of lands under the "Environment 2021-2027" program, as provided for in the National Prioritised Action Framework for the period 2021-2027.

4. The conservation impact achieved by measures undertaken in response to point (3) above should be thoroughly evaluated, and if judged in any way to be less successful than hoped, or if the exploration of options itself has not advanced significantly within one year of the date of the present Recommendation, then alternative options for removal of existing operational wind turbines from Kaliakra should be investigated and implemented as appropriate;

Implementation:

The results of the project described under p. 3 could not be evaluated yet.

As previously reported, since 2018 in the region of Kavarna operates INTEGRATED SYSTEM FOR BIRDS PROTECTION (ISBP). ISBP is applied by all Windfarms on the territory of SPA Kaliakra and operates all year around, including during the spring and autumn migrations as well as registered migrations in search for foraging grounds, leading to high concentrations of birds. To ensure transparency of the research conducted, a systematically updated website has been developed (<https://kaliakrabirdmonitoring.eu/>). Weekly and monthly newsletters, seasonal and annual reports are published on the website. All reports are published in Bulgarian and English, in order to be shared and further used by a wide range of stakeholders, including leading European experts and researchers. The website also provides opportunities for feedback.

The latest available summary report is for the Spring Bird Migration in 2022 and can be found on the following link:

https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/1a109f6d-5fe3-4ff5-bcf3-17602b59ac27/downloads/2022%20Report_Spring%20Bird%20Migration_ENG.pdf?ver=1659683932822.

5. *The successor plan to the Bulgarian National Renewable Energy Action Plan 2011-2020 should re-confirm (and enhance where necessary) the latter's prohibition on wind energy developments in sensitive locations;*

Implementation:

The Ministry of Environment and Water launched a procedure under the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) and the Biodiversity Act (BDA) for the draft *Integrated National Plan in the Field of Energy and Climate (INPFEC) until 2030 of the Republic of Bulgaria*.

Currently the procedure under Chapter six of the EPA and Art. 31 of the BDA (Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment) for a draft Strategy for Sustainable Energy Development (SSED) of the Republic of Bulgaria until 2030 with a horizon until 2050 and INPFEC is on hold pending reflections of the negative assessment on the quality of the Appropriate Assessment report (AA) of the draft SSED made by the Ministry of Environment and Water.

6. *The Bulgarian authorities should provide the Bern Convention Bureau with a short report by March 2019 on the specific ways in which the legal provisions, policy requirements, standards, established practices or other aspects of environmental assessments (SEA/EIA/AA) in Bulgaria meet each of the individual points in paragraphs 1, 4, 8 and 9 of Recommendation No. 130 (2007) or will do so in future (with an indication of the expected timeframe), giving particular attention to the points in the Recommendation concerning cumulative assessment and peer review;*

Implementation:

Implemented: Provided in the Progress report presented to 38th Standing Committee meeting.

7. *The Bulgarian authorities should promote the dissemination (including translation where necessary) and use within the country of the guidance on windfarms and birds developed under the auspices of the Bern Convention (Gove et al. 2013), and the international standards and best practice guidance on EIA/SEA adopted under the Conventions on Biodiversity, Migratory Species and Wetlands, together with related materials produced by the International Association for Impact Assessment;*

Implementation:

Since 2019 the Ministry of Environment and Water uploads and keeps informational documents on its website:

Recently IUCN publication '*Mitigating biodiversity impacts associated with solar and wind energy development -Guidelines for project developers*' was translated into Bulgarian and uploaded on the website.

More information about the implementation could be found in the Progress report presented to 41th Standing Committee meeting.

9. *The Conservation Action Plan for the Red Breasted Goose population in Bulgaria should be funded and implemented without delay, and periodic summary reports on its implementation should be transmitted to the Bern Convention Standing Committee, beginning with a first report in November 2018. Those responsible for the Plan should ensure that thorough and coordinated monitoring of the species' population status and trends receives sustained high priority attention;*

The Action Plan for the Protection of the Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*) in Bulgaria for the period 2018 – 2027, was approved by Order No ПД-355/04.06.2018 of the Minister of Environment and Water.

Currently two projects are under implementation in the frame of procedure under the Operational Program "Environment 2014-2020", as follows:

A. Procedure BG16M1OP002-3.027 'Measures to improve the conservation status of birds – 2'

Project: BG16M1OP002-3.027-0002 "Improvement of the conservation status of the Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*, Pallas, 1769) through the implementation of measures from the Action Plan for the species (AP, 2018)".

Implementation start: 04 Jan.2021. End of the project: 4 May 2024.

The main objective of the project is to improve the conservation status of the red-breasted goose (*Branta ruficollis*), in certain Special Protection Areas (target areas), part of the Natura 2000 network in the country.

The specific objectives are:

1. Ensuring adequate environmental protection regimes for the protection of the species based on the study of its ecological requirements, its migration routes and 'bottlenecks' in its life cycle.
2. Providing knowledge about the influence of external pressures on the population of wintering birds - hunting press, anxiety and toxic influences.
3. Increasing awareness and nature protection culture of the local population and increasing the sensitivity of the society to the problems related to the species and its conservation, by distributing materials about the species and holding special events.

Targeted Natura 2000 sites:

- BG0002050 Durankulashko ezero - 3 356.0 ha.;
- BG0000156 Shablenski ezeren kompleks 3 174.9 ha.,
- BG0002051 Kaliakra 16 171.8 ha.

The main activities of the project are:

Activity No. 1: Conducting specialized studies and research related to the Red-breasted Goose - 1st stage.

Activity No. 2: Conducting specialized studies and research related to the Red-breasted Goose – 2nd stage.

Activity No. 3: Capacity building for distressed bird rescue operations through infrastructure measures.

Activity No. 4: Engaging the general public in the conservation of the Red-breasted Goose - promoting the species and its conservation through production and distribution of printed materials.

Activity No. 5: Engaging the general public in the conservation of the red-breasted goose - organizing and holding festivals related to the species.

The public tenders were held for the selection of contractors and the necessary contracts were signed for the implementation of the project activities.

B. Procedure BG16M1OP002-3.015 'Implementation of priority measures in wetlands':

Project: BG16M1OP002-3.015-0002 "Activities for improvement of the environmental status of the Durankulak Lake and Lake Shabla Wetlands"

Implementation start: 3 Sept.2020. End of the project: 3 May 2024.

main objectives of the project are:

- Limiting the eutrophication processes by reducing the amount of macrophytic vegetation;

- Improving the condition and trends of the population of the red-breasted goose and providing optimal conditions for wintering;
- Improving the condition of the aquatic ecosystems.

Project activities currently under implementation are those related to improving the water regime and limiting the succession processes in the 'Shabla Lake' Ramsar site by building connection with Black Sea are; management of the massifs of hydrophilic vegetation in 'Durankulak Lake' and 'Shabla Lake' Ramsar sites; assessment of the effect of the implementation of the activities for improvement of the water regime and limiting the succession processes and management of the massifs of hydrophilic vegetation, as well as measures to protect the Red-breasted Goose.

Also in accordance with the provisions of the Action Plan for the species, the new National Prioritised Action Framework for Natura 2000 for the period 2021-2027, approved by the European Commission, includes measures aimed at improving the habitats of the Red-breasted Goose.

3. Conclusion

In the light of the information presented we consider that Bulgarian government is fulfilled the obligation set under point 1, 2, 6 and 7 of Recommendation 200 (2018) of the Bern Convention and we expect the Standing Committee to confirm that.

Bulgaria continuously make efforts for improvements in order to meet the objectives of the Bern Convention and to implement mitigation measures in order to protect birds and their habitats.