

REPORT ON THE STATE OF CONSERVATION OF THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST SITE “NATIONAL PARK OF DOÑANA” IN ANSWER TO DECISION 37COM 7B.27

From the time the first 6700 hectares were declared as the Doñana Biological Reserve in 1964 until the latest firm proposal for expansion up to 127,654 ha, which is currently in process, the protected area in this demarcation has increased approximately 18-fold.

The most recent studies show that the state of conservation of Doñana's water system is acceptable albeit with risks. All water masses, such as lakes or subterranean waters, are in a good state of conservation. It is only in the river courses that efforts are now being concentrated.

There has also been considerable progress in the territorial and land use planning. There are two regulatory elements that assure compatibility of uses with the conservation of Doñana, namely the POTAD (definitively approved) and the Organisation Plan for Irrigation in the Forest Crown of Doñana (approval imminent). From 1994 up to the present, the evolution of land uses and the improvement of spatial connectivity have mitigated the most serious threats that affected the National Park at that time. Nonetheless, we are still working to deal with the problems that may arise from expansion of the secondary and farm road Network and the mobility of populations of threatened species.

In the realm of biodiversity, Doñana continues to be an exceptional place for fauna, and particularly bird-life. In 2012 and 2013, at least four of the six catalogued waterfowl species in danger of extinction have reproduced. Five times in the last twelve years the number of bird specimens counted exceeded the half million established as a benchmark in the official registration of Doñana as world heritage, and on two occasions the number of specimens has exceeded 600,000. In some aquatic species there are spectacular trends of population growth. As to birds of prey, breeding numbers of the two species in danger of extinction that have traditionally reproduced in Doñana, the Spanish imperial eagle and the red kite, have been maintained. Since 2002 the number of specimens of Iberian lynx in Doñana has grown steadily, along with the number of territorial females and cubs.

The state of conservation of the vast majority of the habitats in the National Park is considered favourable. These habitats have recently been inventoried specifically and catalogued according to the criteria set out in European Commission Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora. At present the area possesses abundant infrastructure to cater for all the needs of the public as regards communication, information and the enjoyment of nature. More work has also been done on specific and goal-oriented social participation mechanisms, which have made it possible to give civil society a part in decision-making processes on such important aspects as the drafting and approval of the management instruments for the protected area.

As to the particular aspects on which information was requested in the Decision, we would recall that:

Regarding the Balboa Refinery project, the competent body of the State Party issued an adverse Environmental Impact Statement in July 2012, which means that this project cannot be implemented and hence poses no threat to Doñana.

As to the Dredging of the Guadalquivir and the state of the estuary, we should stress that regulatory instruments have been drawn up and technical studies and major projects have been carried out which will be of significant assistance in improving conditions in the estuary. We should note that no work has commenced in connection with deepening dredging of the river. Any action in that respect must comply with the conditions laid down in the Environmental Impact Statement, and evidence of compliance must be produced.

The projects relating to Extraction and Storage of Gas outside the property's boundaries have been subjected to environmental assessment. Nonetheless, the authority competent to grant the unified environmental authorisation and the one required as part of the Doñana Natural Area has suspended the procedures until such time as there is a cumulative impacts of projects.

As to surveillance and risk prevention for the La Rábida Refinery, we believe the request made to the State Party has been fully met, given that the Park managers are in close communication and coordination with the refinery, there is a comprehensive system of planning and prevention at all levels, and appropriate action protocols are in place to deal with emergencies. In particular, Doñana possesses a novel tool, the Auto-protection Plan for the Protected Natural Area of Doñana, whose implementation, accompanied by equipment and specialised training of workers, provides additional guarantees.

As regards the Special Management Plan for Irrigation Zones located to the North of the Forest Crown of Doñana, intensive efforts were made in 2013 to analyse and respond to more than 3800 submissions entailing tremendous cartographic, administrative and legal complexity. Work has likewise gone on in the committees of the Doñana Participatory Council and the Plan will be approved provisionally in the first quarter of 2014 following a report by the Participatory Council of the Doñana Natural Area. Final approval by the Cabinet and the Government of Andalusia is expected in the second quarter of 2014.

In any case it should be remembered that the competent authorities are still working to solve the problems addressed by the Plan, intensifying the surveillance and legal actions and approving projects designed to replace subterranean uptake by surface waters from another basin. Moreover, the Guadalquivir Basin Water Plan limits the overexploitation of the Almonte-Marismas aquifer and proposes measures to augment the protection of the national park.

In conclusion, while acknowledging the challenge entailed in working with criteria of sustainability in such a large populated territory, in the vicinity of a river mouth, it is clear that Doñana is in good health and the values that prompted its inclusion in the World Heritage list have improved to some extent. This is evidenced by most of the indicators on the wetland values that prompted its classification, and is borne out by the work of technicians, scientists, environmental agents, volunteers and other collaborators. That is the view taken by the experts from the Group of Specialists of the European Diploma of Protected Areas, the Commission of the Berne Convention and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which have decided to renew Doñana's European Diploma for Management until 2020 in recognition of the quality, maintenance and conservation of the natural values of the Area and the policies pursued to assure optimum management.

Nevertheless, there are some risks and problems which need to be foreseen and addressed, deriving especially from pressures extraneous to the natural area. The situation as it was when Doñana was listed has manifestly improved, and it now possesses the technical and legal instruments needed to deal with the present problems and prepare for future ones. Its management is founded on good administrative coordination, input from scientific research and public participation. The protected area of Doñana is larger today and the regime of protection is better able to deal with possible threats than when it was declared in 1969, and even than when it was registered as World Heritage in 1994. It currently possesses the organizational structures, the know-how, the experience and the tools necessary to deal with present problems and anticipate future ones, and its management has achieved a high level of excellence in the conservation of its values, on a basis of administrative coordination, input from scientific research and public participation. For all those reasons the State Party asserts that, as the above-reported data show, Doñana continues to maintain the outstanding universal values that prompted its inclusion in the World Heritage List.