

Question for written answer E-003966/2026

to the Commission

Rule 144

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Subject: The Viiankiaapa Natura derogation and the sustainability of the Natura 2000 network

In Finland, plans are afoot to grant the first exceptional permit for a mining project on a Natura 2000 site: the Sakatti project on the Viiankiaapa mire, which is also protected under Finland's Mire Conservation Act¹. Meanwhile, ore prospecting or mining projects are being considered for about 15 Natura sites in Finland². If granted, the derogation could set a dangerous precedent, undermining the protection mechanism laid down in Article 6 of the Habitats Directive and thus also the credibility of the EU's entire nature conservation system³. It is also problematic that, in the national debate, the Commission's definition of a project as 'strategic' is being used as an argument to weaken nature conservation, even though, according to its previous statements, the Commission did not assess the environmental impact of the projects in any way in making that designation.

1. How will the Commission ensure that the Finnish case does not set a dangerous precedent for the deterioration of protected areas, and how will it safeguard the sustainability of the entire Natura 2000 network, including the cumulative effects of the numerous projects under consideration on Natura sites?
2. On what basis does the Commission assess whether the conditions of Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive⁴ are met, i.e. imperative reasons of overriding public interest, the absence of alternative solutions and compensatory measures?
3. Does the Commission intend to confirm publicly that 'strategic project' status cannot in itself serve as a legal basis for weakening the level of protection under the Habitats Directive, does it also intend to require Finland to base the assessment of the imperative reason for a derogation on a separate, project-specific environmental impact assessment, and will it inform the Finnish authorities of this position before issuing its opinion?

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¹ <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/lainsaadanto/1988/851>

² <https://yle.fi/a/74-20246615>

³ <https://euobserver.com/236357/finlands-first-licence-to-mine-a-natura-2000-site-would-set-a-deadly-precedent-for-eu-nature-protection/>

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex:31992L0043>