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Answer given by Ms Roswall
on behalf of the European Commission
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The Commission published on 14 July 2026 a new guidance document on Natura 2000 and sustainable tourism¹, to help Member States and stakeholders reconcile nature protection with socio-economic development. The guidance provides a framework to address tourism pressures by assessing carrying capacity, identifying impacts and providing appropriate management measures.

EU nature protection legislation does not automatically exclude tourism or other economic activities in or around Natura 2000 sites designated under the Birds² and Habitats³ Directives⁴, provided they do not cause deterioration of habitats, or significant disturbance of species (Article 6 (2) of the Habitats Directive) for which the sites were designated. Where a plan or project is likely to significantly affect a Natura 2000 site, it must undergo an appropriate assessment under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive and may be authorised only where, taking account of cumulative effects, it has been ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site. Accordingly, tourism projects in protected areas can be compatible with EU nature protection legislation only where all applicable requirements of that legislations are fully complied with.

Member States remain responsible for land-use and tourism planning, but measures designed to facilitate investment or development cannot exempt projects from applicable EU environmental requirements. In particular, regulatory or economic regimes that relax national safeguards cannot circumvent the obligations arising under EU environmental legislation, including requirements concerning the protection of birds, habitats, water and marine resources, and environmental impact assessment.

¹ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4cc63772-80c4-11f1-bf5e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

² Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds, OJ L 20, 26.1.2010, p. 7–25.

³ Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7–50.

⁴ Natura 2000 Viewer <https://natura2000.eea.europa.eu/> and Natura 2000 network https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/natura-2000_en.