

To:

Mr Vella,  
Rue de la Loi 200  
1049 Brussels Belgium.

Copy:

Mr O'Brien  
Avenue de Beaulieu 5  
1160 Brussels Belgium

From:

Mr Jos Custers,  
Municipal Executive Eijsden-Margraten  
e-mail: [joscusters@eijsden-margraten.nl](mailto:joscusters@eijsden-margraten.nl)  
Tel. 0031 43 458 8488



To:

The European Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries:

Mr Vella

Rue de la Loi 200

1049 Brussels BELGIUM

Subject: Fitness Check of EU Nature Legislation (Birds and Habitats Directives), consultation.

Margraten, 24 July 2015

Dear mr. Vella,

The European Commission has taken the initiative to evaluate the EU Nature Legislation and perform a fitness check on the Birds and Habitats Directives (known jointly in the Netherlands as Natura 2000). In this context, you have provided the opportunity for feedback via the Internet from 30 April to 24 July.

We, the municipalities of South Limburg, the Netherlands, would like to make use of this opportunity.

#### A positive initiative

First of all, we would like to emphasise that we are positive about your Commission's initiative. Every government in the EU would do well to critically evaluate its policy as you are. The opportunity that you have given for the provision of feedback in this context will certainly encourage support among the citizens of the EU.

#### South Limburg: heavily populated region with unique natural ecosystems and landscapes

We, the representatives of the municipalities of South Limburg, would like to draw your attention to the impact of the EU nature policy on our region. South Limburg is a region of many qualities. It is a conurbation with a green heart and many green accents around the cities. The nature and landscapes here are of high quality. The region is typified by small-scale landscapes, and many hills and valleys with unique brook valleys and sloping woodlands.

The region is densely populated. At 910 residents per km<sup>2</sup>, the population density here is almost twice the Dutch average, which is already high, and around 8 times the average population density in the EU.

Nonetheless, in a relatively small area of 660km<sup>2</sup>, South Limburg is home to no fewer than ten EU Protected Habitats, some of which border with EU Protected Habitats in Germany and Belgium.

#### A great variety of essential functions, including agriculture

The landscapes and nature in South Limburg are important, not only for their intrinsic qualities, but also as a recreational area for the many residents of South Limburg, the rest of the Netherlands, and neighbouring countries. This region has many aspects: residential, countryside, nature, recreation and agriculture. Within agriculture, extensive farming, including cattle farming, arable farming and fruit cultivation, are key components. The agriculture sector also fulfils many essential roles:

- Landscape management: around two-thirds of the land is owned by parties in the agricultural sector;
- Facilitator of/contributor to better quality of life in small urban centres;
- Social services provider, for example, nature management, care farms and farmer's shops;
- Supplier of safe and reliable food; and
- Economic powerhouse for the countryside.

#### Preservation of room for agricultural development necessary

The characteristics of the region already limit the options for agriculture. Agricultural developments have to fit in with the qualities of the area and must be adapted to the physical limitations of the area, which is characterised by primarily small parcels of land, diverse landscape elements and many contours.

Natura 2000 is an additional limitation. We are concerned that continuation of the current policy will be at the expense of the integral qualities of the region, such as the high quality of the South Limburg brook valleys. The quality of these valleys is dependent upon brook valley grasslands grazed on by cattle. Market developments should ensure that cattle farms can continue to develop, protecting their right to exist and their income. These market developments cause farms to close, and transfer their animals and land to other farms. In this way, cattle farms play an important role in the countryside, and for society.

The nitrogen deposition, however, makes it almost impossible for cattle farms to develop in this way, threatening their added value for the landscape and natural environment. It is with regret that we note from the figures from the Dutch government that 50-70% of the nitrogen deposition in South Limburg originates from outside the Netherlands.

The potential reduction of cattle farming has further consequences. It will make it difficult, across the region, to meet the EU targets for nitrate and phosphates, not only in the brook valleys, but in the other parts of the countryside, such as the sloping woodlands, and in the quality of the groundwater. In addition, the diversity in South Limburg will be reduced, which, in our view, will have far-reaching consequences for tourism and recreation, which are important sources of income for our beautiful region.

#### More balance needed between natural environment and agriculture

The municipalities of South Limburg are proud of the region's beautiful natural environments and landscapes and do not wish to part from them. They are also proud of the farmers that manage this very landscape, and who are crucial for maintaining the buffers around the natural environments and meeting the preconditions, as far as landscape is concerned, for the natural environments.

We are therefore of the opinion that a better balance between agriculture and natural environments is needed. In our view, South Limburg's extensive agriculture should not be seen only as a threat, nitrogen-related or otherwise, but as a precondition for maintaining the ecosystems and landscape of our region. A better balance would not only be in the interest of the EU's valuable natural environments, but also for the realisation of EU standards for soil and water, and for retaining the quality of life in the countryside.



We are therefore of the opinion that a better balance between agriculture and natural environments is needed. In our view, South Limburg's extensive agriculture should not be seen only as a threat, nitrogen-related or otherwise, but as a precondition for maintaining the ecosystems and landscape of our region. A better balance would not only be in the interest of the EU's valuable natural environments, but also for the realisation of EU standards for soil and water, and for retaining the quality of life in the countryside.

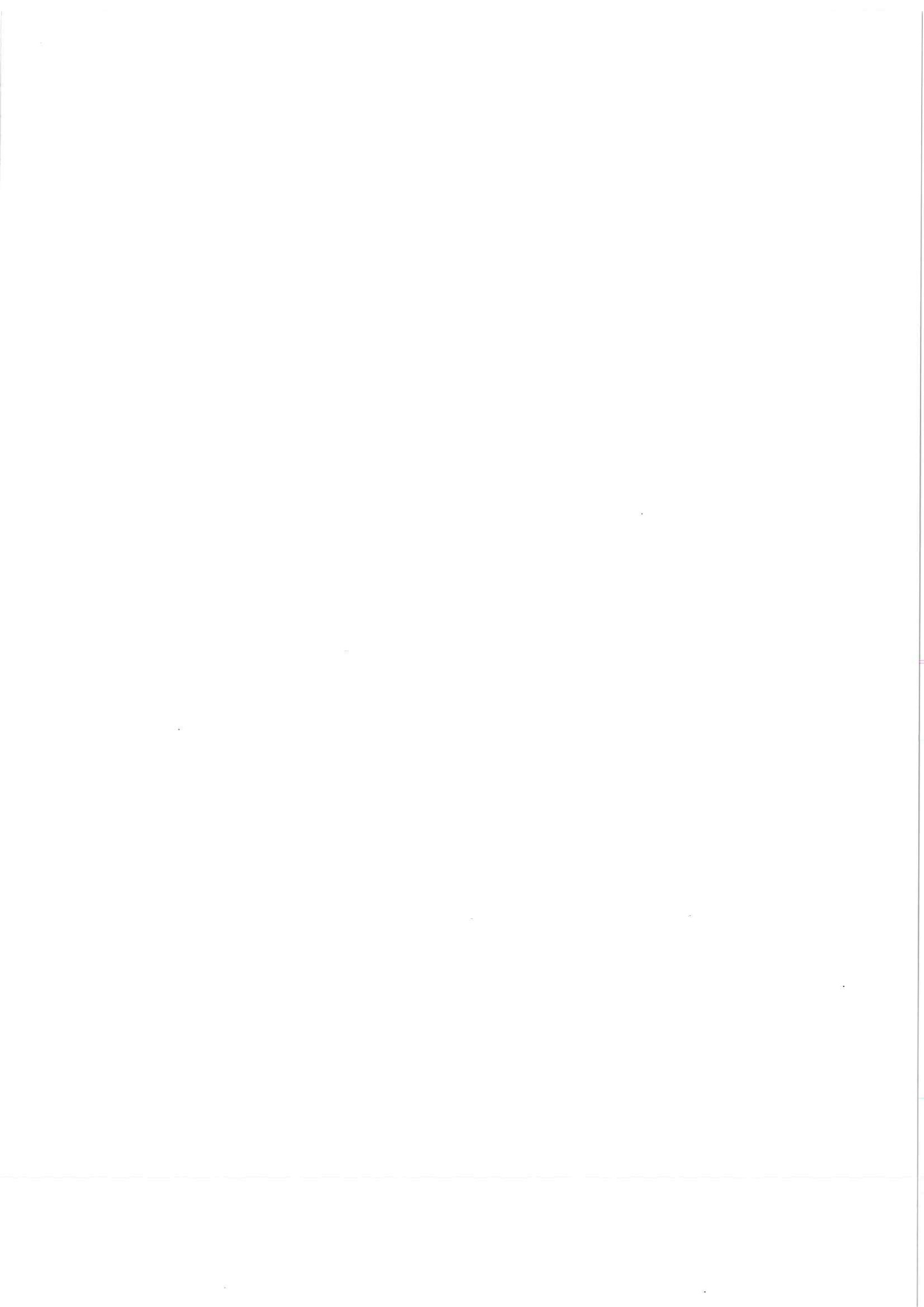
#### Changes to nature directives and/or guidelines desirable

As evidenced by rulings of the Dutch and European courts, the current European guidelines focus on protecting natural ecosystems. We call for a more integral and balanced approach whereby – while meeting the nature targets – local and regional governments are able to weigh up the interests of natural ecosystems, the landscape, and the economy. The European regulations should explicitly make this possible and by explicitly including the necessity to weigh up such factors in the regulations or guidelines for the member states, this option would be left open.

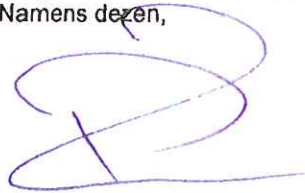
A European policy that provides more opportunities for individual agriculture entrepreneurs to generate income would benefit the natural ecosystems AND the landscape AND the quality of life in rural areas AND the economy (recreation, tourism, agricultural businesses).

We therefore appeal for a policy from the EU that provides more opportunities for our agricultural entrepreneurs to generate income. This approach would benefit all interests in the region.

The Municipal Executive of the municipalities of South Limburg, the Netherlands




Burgemeester en wethouders van de gemeente Beek,  
Namens dezen,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a horizontal line at the bottom.

Peter Hovens, wethouder

D 24/7

Burgemeester en wethouders van de gemeente Eijsden-Margraten,  
Namens dezen,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large initial 'J' followed by a series of connected loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Jos Custers, wethouder

TD 2017



Burgemeester en wethouders van de gemeente Gulpen-Willem,  
Namens dezen,

P. FRANSSEN

D 24/17

Burgemeester en wethouders van de gemeente Heerlen,  
Namens dezen,

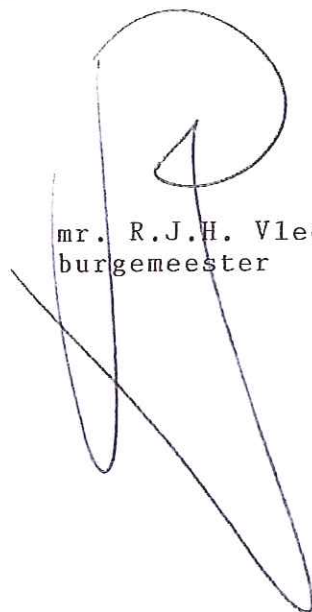
A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, sweeping initial 'N' followed by 'ico Aarts'.

Nico Aarts, wethouder

Burgemeester en wethouders van de gemeente Landgraaf,  
Namens dezen,

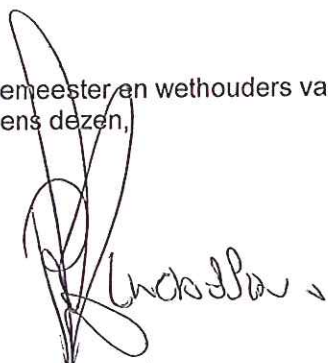


ir J.M.C. Rijvers  
secretaris



mr. R.J.H. Vlecken  
burgemeester

Burgemeester en wethouders van de gemeente Nuth,  
Namens dezen,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ramon Lucassen', written over a large, stylized flourish.

Ramon Lucassen, wethouder

24/7

Burgemeester en Wethouders van de gemeente Schinnen,  
Namens dezen,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'J. van der...' with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

D/24/7

Burgemeester en wethouders van de gemeente Simpelveld,  
Namens dezen,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. J. H. Schlijpen', with a horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

W. J. H. Schlijpen  
Wethouder



Burgemeester en wethouders van de gemeente Stein,  
Namens dezen,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping, sweeping lines that form a stylized, elongated shape.

D. Hendrix, Loco-Burgemeester.

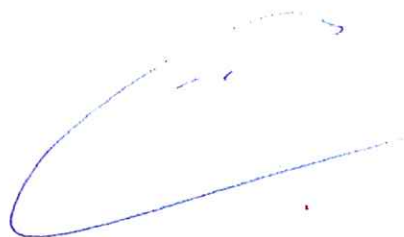
D/24/7

Burgemeester en wethouders van de gemeente Vaals,  
Namens dezen,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'R' followed by a long horizontal stroke that loops back under the initial.

24/17

Burgemeester en wethouders van de gemeente Valkenburg aan de Geul,  
Namens dezen,



des. H.M.L. DALVEN.

Gemeente Eijsden-Margraten  
t.a.v. wethouder J. Custers  
Postbus 10  
6269 ZG MARGRATEN

Uw brief van 27 mei 2015	Uw kenmerk 17125, 17121, 17129	Ons kenmerk 19963	Voerendaal 16 juni 2015
Onderwerp Reactie in het kader van de fitnesscheck Natura 2000		Behandeld door René Cleef	Bijlagen

Geachte heer Custer,

Naar aanleiding van uw bovenvermelde brief inzake uw reactie in het kader van de fitnesscheck Natura 2000 bericht ik u als volgt.

Wegens agendatechnische problemen lukt het mij niet om aan het overleg van woensdag 17 juni a.s. deel te nemen.  
Met deze brief wil ik toch reageren op de door u opgestelde reactie.

Ik stel het op prijs dat u de moeite heeft genomen om een gezamenlijke reactie met betrekking tot de fitnesscheck Natura 2000 voor de Zuid-Limburgse gemeenten op te stellen. Hierin geeft u aan, u dat de Zuid-Limburgse grondgebonden landbouw niet alleen gezien moet worden als een (stikstof)bedreiging, maar ook als een randvoorwaarde om die natuur en dat landschap in stand te houden. Ik ben het met deze stellingname eens en ben bereid om reactie te ondertekenen.

Toch wil ik enkele kanttekeningen bij uw brief van 27 mei jl. plaatsen:

- Ik wil erop wijzen, dat de laatste jaren in het kader van de zogenaamde PAS (= Programmatische Aanpak Stikstof) heel lang en uitvoering is gesproken over de stikstofbedreiging en -aanpak. De PAS is juist ten behoeve van de Natura 2000-gebieden opgesteld. Doel van deze aanpak is juist om ruimte voor economische ontwikkelingen te creëren, een versterking van de natuur na te streven en de stikstofuitstoot te verminderen. Deze afspraken zijn in samenspraak met overheden, natuurorganisaties en het (agrarische) bedrijfsleven tot stand

Onderwerp  
Reactie in het kader van de fitnesscheck  
Natura 2000

Ons kenmerk  
19963

Voerendaal  
16 juni 2015

Paginanummer  
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gekomen;

- De gemeente Eijsden-Margraten wijst met name op het belang van agrariërs voor het landschap en de economie van Limburg. Ik wil nadrukkelijk aandacht vragen voor de sector 'toerisme en recreatie'. Het economische belang van deze sector overstijgt dat van de agrariër. Voor sector 'toerisme en recreatie' is natuur en landschap één van de belangrijkste drijfveren om Zuid-Limburg te bezoeken en daarom is het van belang om natuur en landschap goed te beschermen en - indien mogelijk - zelfs te versterken. Dit doel is rechtstreeks terug te vinden in de Natura 2000-regeling.
- Niet ontkend wordt dat de regelgeving voor natuur en landschap strikt is maar dat dit ook nodig is om deze "zwakke" sector middels regelgeving te beschermen. Laat onverlet dat uitbreidingen - zoals recent bij een Voerendaalse melkveehouderij heeft plaatsgevonden - mogelijk zijn, indien aan de hiervoor geldende voorwaarden wordt voldaan.

Ik vertrouw erop u hiermee voldoende te hebben geïnformeerd.

Portefeuillehouder natuur en landschap van Voerendaal,



Patrick Leunissen.

D 24/7

