



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
ENVIRONMENT
Directorate E - International Affairs
ENV.E.3 - LIFE - Nature
Head of Unit

Brussels, 24 June 2010
ENV.E3 JC/jv ARES (2010) 364475

SUMMARY NOTE
CONFERENCE "LIFE NATURE AND BIODIVERSITY – PREPARING THE FUTURE"

The conference "LIFE Nature and Biodiversity – preparing the future" took place in Brussels on 31 May and 1 June 2010. It had about 350 participants who discussed in a very open manner the future of LIFE+ - Nature and Biodiversity, both in terms of what can still be done under the current LIFE+ Regulation and of the way in which a future Regulation might be structured.

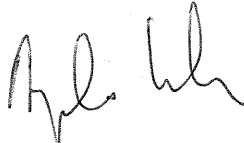
Participants represented a varied group of stakeholders, including current and former beneficiaries of LIFE/LIFE+ grants, national authorities, NGOs, researchers, etc.

Due to the "brainstorming" format of the conference, a large number of ideas were introduced and discussed, with varying degrees of importance and feasibility. Some key ideas obtained a certain degree of consensus among the participants:

- Continuation of a dedicated financial instrument, with a significantly increased budget, centrally managed by the Commission, in parallel with reinforced integration in other financial instruments, is recognised as the best option for the next years, although most participants would like this to prepare the transition to a fully dedicated Nature and Biodiversity fund.
- The future financial instrument should cover the wider biodiversity and not be limited to Natura 2000. It needs, however, to keep the focus on Natura 2000 as the key instrument to protect biodiversity in the EU.
- Complementarity with other financial instruments should follow a more positive approach, effectively promoting a complementary use of the different instruments. A programme-based approach, by which Member States define their needs for the management of Natura 2000 and the different sources of funding that will be used to cover those needs, including the successor to LIFE+, would be an effective way to promote complementarity.
- A more effective coordination between DG Environment and the Commission services responsible for other funding mechanisms (DGs for Agriculture, Regional Development, Maritime Affairs) should ensure a more coherent approach in the different Regulations, promoting a programme-based approach by Member States or Regions, as mentioned above.

Other issues on which there was a good consensus in the meeting concerned:

- The need for a more important role for scientific research in LIFE projects. While in some cases participation of researchers is already taking place, this is rather the exception more than the rule. The LIFE regulation excludes "research" as such, at the same time FP7 does not seem to be geared to support the research activities that are need in the short term to generate the knowledge necessary to plan and implement LIFE projects. There was a general call to make LIFE more accessible for research and researcher more welcome. Research activities that are directly necessary for the project should be considered and publications in research magazines should be welcome as an important deliverable of LIFE projects.
- The maximum co-financing rate under LIFE+. This is considered to be too low when compared to other instruments, at EU or national level. A more flexible approach to the application of higher co-financing rates, to take into account also the needs of the beneficiary organisations and not only the priority character of the species or habitats on which work is done would be welcome by many. Such an approach should also take into account economic convergence criteria and the responsibilities of each Member State with respect to implementation of Natura 2000.
- Several NGOs expressed the point of view that the current rules of LIFE+ are not sufficiently "NGO-friendly". Suggestions for improvement included the availability of funding for the preparation of projects, higher co-financing rates for NGOs and an increased flexibility of the payment schemes. Also keeping the possibility to finance small scale project was stressed as a positive element.
- There was general agreement that, while LIFE Nature projects have clearly a "nature conservation" objective, they all have a potential to deliver in terms of ecosystem services. The benefits of the project towards these services should be part of the project proposal and should be actively promoted e.g. at local level to show the concrete advantages that the project brings to society.
- Several interventions mentioned the possibility of expanding funding outside the EU, especially for migratory animals. The call was not for a new LIFE Third Countries tool, but more for a flexible approach when spending outside EU as long as this would bring added value for the project objective in the EU.
- More needs to be done on the "forgotten species" (arthropods, molluscs, lower plants, etc.). There are many reasons why these species are not sufficiently prominent in field nature conservation: their poor visibility (not flag species), the lack of knowledge and the limited involvement of the research world, the size of LIFE projects and their complexity. While not all these problems can be solved at once, several interventions stressed the importance to start acting now.



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