THE SPANISH ECONOMIC INTEREST IN INVESTING IN THE ENVIRONMENT

While having been an EU member state for more than 20 years, Spain is the 3rd top recipient of EU funds (receiving in 2010 EUR 3.1 billion). However, Spain’s use of EU funds has had no long-term impact on its financial stability and its unemployment rate is at a high (20% in April 2010). In the next financial period (2014-20), Spain is likely to become a net payer.

Although Spain has missed almost 20 years of financial gain, it still has an opportunity to ensure its investments and those of the EU are beneficial for the local environment and thus local economies.

The potential of European funds to be utilised for nature, biodiversity, ecosystem services and climate action to increase local economies, to comply with the EU requirements and to avoid environmental degradation, will depend on the EU leadership. In prioritising on its local environment as a tool to benefit its local economies and leveraging on European money, Spain would be investing European tax payer’s money in public goods.

FACTS

1. Spain has one of EU’s largest percentages of protected areas (including terrestrial Natura 2000) making up 27.7% of its territory.
2. Since 1986, Spain has received from the EU EUR 93 billion net, of which it invested EUR 274.9 million of European funding (LIFE programme) to directly support the environment. This is the same amount of money that Spain has received from the Cohesion Fund to expand 400 hectares of the Port of Barcelona.
3. A study in Galicia showed that the willingness to pay for nature is EUR 113 per family per year to increase the coverage of protected areas in the region from 36,000 hectares to 280,000 hectares.
In 2010, Spain contributed a total of EUR 10 billion to the EU’s budget. 

Increase the total budget of the EU’s environmental fund “LIFE” from 0.23% to 1% of the total EU Budget (circa 1.5 billion EUR per year); 

EU investment should be adequately channelled to energy efficiency and improved water management. 

Sustainable tourism, that respects the natural environment promotes traditional activities, including traditional products, increases productivity and all together preserve the environment and landscape. 

Spain should ensure that EU funding is spent in a quality way that leads to a sustainable economy that benefits Spanish society.

EU policy
1. Increase the total budget of the EU’s environmental fund “LIFE” from 0.23% to 1% of the total EU Budget (circa 1.5 billion EUR per year); 
2. Balance the two pillars of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and ensure 50% of its total budget delivers towards the Rural Development Programme; 
3. Ensure the EU Budget delivers 20% of climate action, especially through climate mitigation under cohesion policy; 
4. Establish a tracking system that documents specific positive and negative effects of EU funds for climate and biodiversity. 
5. Support the establishment and financing of the Voluntary scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of the EU Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories (BEST). 

National planning & programming
1. Establish clear earmarking of EU funds for the financing of the Natura 2000 network, based on national or regional priority action frameworks; 
2. Ensure sufficient funding is available for well targeted and well designed agri-environmental and other environmental measures under rural development; 
3. Finance Green Infrastructure and projects on energy efficiency under regional development; 
4. Involve all relevant actors, including environmental NGOs, during national planning and implementation of European funds (including partnership contracts). 

HOW EU SUBSIDIES ARE WASTED ON ENVIRONMENTALLY HARMFUL ACTIVITIES

The development of the no-toll 21-km A-2 Motorway (which runs parallel to the national road) from Cervera to Santa Maria del Camí cost the EU EUR 135 million through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Not only was the road not tolled, it cost as much as the total amount the EU gives directly to Spain’s national plans (such as its rural development plans and operational programmes) are essential for supporting environmental needs. Currently, agriculture funds and structural and cohesion funds only use 10% of their potential to benefit the environment.

HOW EU FUNDS CAN BE INVESTED INTO FUTURE BENEFITS

With the same amount of funds required to build 260 meters of the motorway Cervera – Santa Maria del Camí, Spain has built its National Renewable Energies Centre (also using ERDF), which apart from its impact on the local economy of Navarra (increasing production, income and employment thought the attraction of new companies and new economic activities), hired 120 researchers and advanced Spain as a global leader in renewable energies. The cost of 15 km of the same motorway is equivalent to a project aimed at strengthening energy saving and renewable energy “Andalucía A +”, which has saved 24,000 tons of CO2 since 2007, making Andalucía the leading region in Spain in terms of thermal solar energy. Land based management activities have similar impacts to the Spanish economy. Since 2003, the EU’s agri-environment scheme for the conservation of the Great bustard has, for example, helped increase economic activity in disadvantaged rural areas. In the Villarafía Lagoons Natura 2000 site, this scheme has helped save and manage the largest Great bustard population in the EU.

BIRDLIFE RECOMMENDATIONS – HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

> The EU Budget should redirect funds towards rewarding the delivery of public goods. EU funds can be used to support local products and handicrafts that are linked to Spanish cultural heritage and natural landscape. 
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1. In 2010, Spain contributed a total of EUR 10 billion (including customs and farm trade duties collected on behalf of the EU of which 25% was retained by Spain) and received EUR 13.1 billion. European Commission (2011), EU budget 2010 - Financial Report. 
11. European Commission. Regional Policy – InfoRegio. Project example: Spain – “The best energy is energy which is not used”.

Download the report at: www.birdlife.org/eubiodiversityreport2012