EXITING THE CRISSES: BRITISH INVESTMENT IN THE ENVIRONMENT

In 2010, the UK had a net contribution of EUR 7.9 billion (GBP 6.24 billion) to the EU budget\(^1\), which is 0.31% of UK Gross National Income (GNI). The investment of the EU Budget in the UK can boost local economies through strategic and coordinated actions and support public goods, such as biodiversity.

The UK government’s current position on the EU budget is to reduce it in totality. Increasing the total amount the UK receives from the budget does not help the UK as for each pound gained a proportion is lost from the UK rebate. The UK government therefore opposes any increase to any part of the EU budget.

Most of the public money for biodiversity conservation in the UK comes through European funds. The largest single source being for agri-environmental payments.

Futhermore, the EU and the UK have made international commitments to finance global biodiversity, climate change, and resource efficiency challenges. Yet they also fail to ensure this is achieved in Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) and Outermost Regions (ORs). The UK’s overseas territories contain a large percentage of its endemic species in fragile island ecosystems. Allowing EU funds to be used in these areas would enable the EU and the UK to better meet their environmental commitments.

The EU Budget is a rare opportunity to ensure that scarce taxpayers’ money is used to enhance the quality of life of its citizens. To do this, Europe must rise to the challenge of tackling climate change and biodiversity loss.

NATURA 2000 COVERAGE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

1. Hope Farm

FACTS

1. The terrestrial Natura 2000 network covers 7.2% of the total area of the UK\(^2\) and its citizens make over 2.5 billion visits to natural sites per year.\(^3\)

2. The UK’s biodiversity is very distinctive in Europe due to its geographical and climatic conditions. For example, the UK holds 10% of the total peat bogs in Europe.\(^4\)

3. The Environment Agency estimates that water pollution from agriculture costs between EUR 565.3 and 1107.8 million (GBP 445 and 872 million) per year in England and Wales.\(^5\)

4. The total costs of meeting the biodiversity priorities for all of the UK’s OCTs are estimated at EUR 1.85 million (GBP 1.45 million) per year over five years.\(^6\)
In 2010, the United Kingdom contributed a total of EUR 14.66 billion to the EU’s budget. This amount is comparable to the amount paid in direct payments each year. The UK produces some of the safest drinking water in the world. However, it costs water companies at least EUR 163.9 million (GBP 1.29 million) in England and Wales alone to remove diffuse pollution from water. Therefore, increasing water quality by 2015 would bring economic benefits of EUR 1.3 - 4.8 billion (GBP 1 - 3.8 billion) a year to English and Welsh households.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) currently accounts for over 40% of the total EU budget. In spite of the vast amount of taxpayers’ money involved, three quarters of the CAP budget continues to be spent without clear links to the delivery of public goods. In the UK alone, it is estimated that between EUR 1.3 - 3.8 billion (GBP 1 - 3 billion) a year is needed for environmental land management to pay for environmental policy commitments including biodiversity targets, Water Framework Directive requirements, climate change mitigation, and flood risk management. This is considerably more than the money currently available within the UK's CAP budget that is currently spent on the environment, but is comparable to the amount paid in direct payments each year. The UK produces some of the safest drinking water in the world. However, it costs water companies at least EUR 163.9 million (GBP 1.29 million) in England and Wales alone to remove diffuse pollution from water – costs that are passed on to customers in higher water bills. Using CAP funds to reduce water pollution at the source would help cut these costs. Achieving good water quality by 2015 would bring economic benefits of EUR 1.3 - 4.8 billion (GBP 1 - 3.8 billion) a year to English and Welsh households.

INVEST IN THE BEST – THE EU BUDGET WORKING SUCCESSFULLY FOR FARMERS AND NATURE IN THE UK

In 2000, the RSPB (Birdlife UK) purchased Hope Farm. It is a medium-sized profitable arable farm like any other. It is conventionally managed like 95% of all arable farms in England, with a typical rotation of winter sown wheat, oilseed rape, and spring sown beans. Yet, what makes it remarkable is the recovery of farmland bird numbers. The use of agri-environment schemes has led to the “farmland bird indicator”—the combined trend in numbers of a suite of farmland birds—rocketing by 200% over the last 10 years. This environmental improvement has been achieved while increasing food production and without affecting profits, proving that changes in farming practices can protect biodiversity and the farmer’s livelihood.

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 British cultural heritage and natural landscape.

> 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.

> Britain should ensure that EU funding is being spent in a quality way that leads Europe to a sustainable economy that benefits British 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-environment schemes 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).