



# THE HIDDEN TRUTH – France – Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur

## Environmental impact of new Rural Development Programmes – 2014-2020

One of the overarching aims of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform was to make it deliver more for the environment. This factsheet therefore analyses the quality of public spending. It looks at what hides behind the official numbers and what French Rural Development spending in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region means for the environment, specifically for biodiversity.

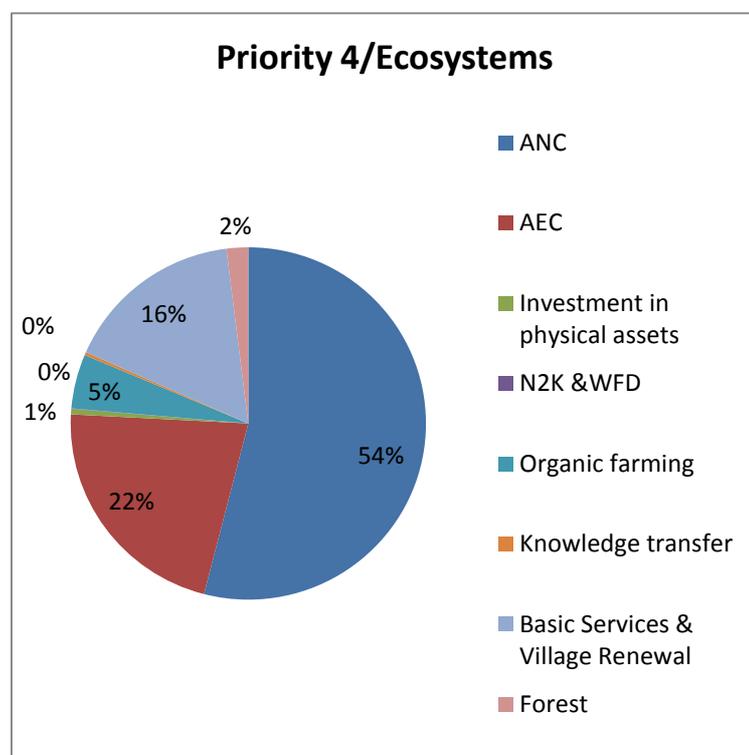
### STATE OF PLAY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT:

The Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region (PACA) in France is a biodiversity hotspot of global importance. 63% of the total territory is mountainous and extensively farmed; forests cover 41% of the region and more than 30.6% of the region is designated as part of the Natura 2000 network.

Climate change and the increasing pressure on water resources, the rapid development of wood biomass production as a renewable energy source, and urbanisation due to tourism are the principal threats to the environment.

During the last 10 years, the Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA) fell by 12%. The region has the highest percentage of UAA (14%) in France covered by organic farming, with a target of 30%. Two large biomass power plants have been established to process the regional wood supply, adding pressure to the sustainable management of forests and to the general environmental quality of the region (air quality, biodiversity, landscape).

**All of the protected extensive grasslands within the Natura 2000 network are not in a favourable condition.**



### FARMLAND BIRD INDEX:

Farmland Birds have **decreased by 13%** in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region over the last 10 years.

### Priority 4: RURAL DEVELOPMENT BUDGET FOR 'ECOSYSTEMS': reality and practice

The implementation of EU RD programmes should fulfil a number of set objectives and priorities. While 72% of the RD money in the PACA region has been allocated to measures that *should* directly benefit biodiversity, water and soil<sup>1</sup>, the reality is that not all measures for which this money has been earmarked have high environmental value. These measures may, at best, benefit nature indirectly, such as payments for farming in Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC), but they are not tied to concrete environmental targets and benefits. Indeed, the region's largest share of money

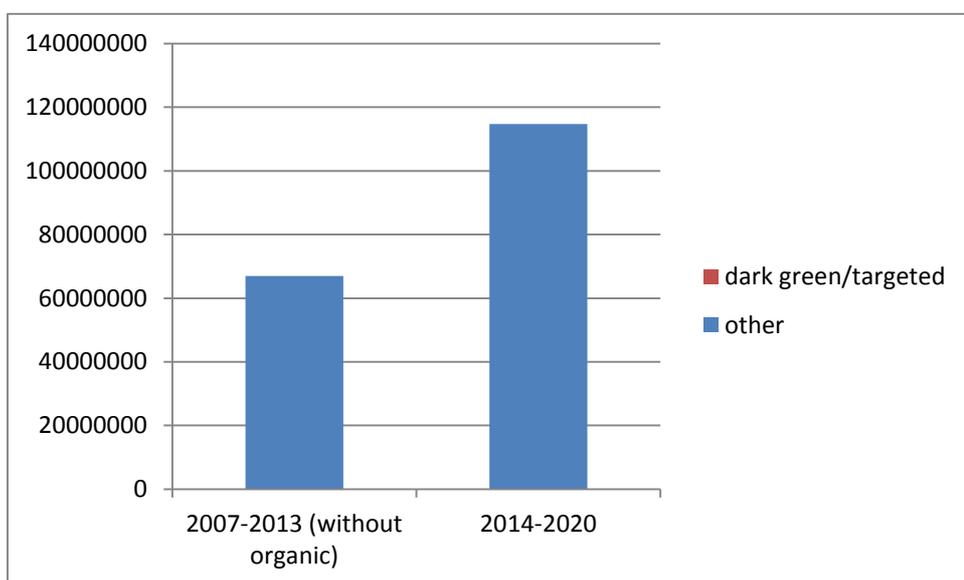
<sup>1</sup> Priority 4, as foreseen by the Rural Development Regulation, Art. 5



under this priority (54%) will go to ANC farmers. Although the measure is not linked to any environmental objectives, the payment rates vary according to the stocking density, with higher rates for more extensive farmers.

Some RDP measures also risk harming the environment and biodiversity, for example by supporting the expansion of irrigation and of water consuming crops. It is also inconsistent to refer to a species that is protected by EU nature legislation, i.e. the Grey Wolf, as a threat to biodiversity.

### AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SPENDING: past vs. future



In the PACA region 16% of RD money will be spent on Agri-Environment measures (AEC) – this is a significant increase when compared to the previous spending period and a step in the right direction.

However, none of the AEC budget will be spent on schemes targeted directly at specific species, habitats or biodiversity problems, i.e. ‘dark green’ measures which really tackle the issues at stake. In comparison, the AEC budget will be spent on schemes which are less effective at delivering

for biodiversity or even for the environment; mainly they will generate environmental benefits indirectly, without setting clear targets, conditions or requirements. This is the case in the PACA region with many agri-environment schemes supporting pastoralism and landscape management.

#### What do we mean by ‘dark green’ agri-environment measures:

The European Court of Auditors, in its special report from 2011\* looking at effectiveness of agri-environment, recommended that agri-environment measures should be more precisely targeted and that there should be a higher rate of EU contribution for sub-measures with a higher environmental potential. In our analysis we have looked at what proportion of agri-environment budget has been allocated to targeted, as we call them ‘dark green’, measures for biodiversity. As EAFRD and Rural Development plans do not recognise such a category, we have worked with regional and national experts to assess measures, using the following principles: The measure has been considered ‘dark green’ if it is targeted to specific species (group of species), habitats or a specific biodiversity problem (pollinator strips).

\* **ECA Special report no 7/2011:** Is agri-environment support well designed and managed?



## FARM BIODIVERSITY CONTRACTS INSUFFICIENT TO REACH EU BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY OBJECTIVES

The EU's Biodiversity Strategy clearly states that by 2020 the area of farmland covered by biodiversity-related measures must be maximised in order to achieve a measurable improvement of species dependent on or affected by agriculture.

The French government claims that 33.1% of farmland in the PACA region will be covered under voluntary contracts for biodiversity protection, but measures under the new RDP which could be genuinely beneficial for biodiversity are only applicable to a small proportion of farmland. None of the RDP measures meet our definition of 'dark green' measures.

## INACTION ON NATURA 2000

Rural Development Programmes should include an approach to tackling the specific needs of Natura 2000 areas.<sup>2</sup> Although 26.6% of the UAA is designated as Natura 2000, only 100 of the 214,000ha of Natura 2000 farmland, are targeted by Natura 2000 payments in the current period. Other RD schemes do prioritise Natura 2000 sites. However, **the RDP does not efficiently address the needs of the Natura 2000 network in the French PACA region.**

## EUROPE NEEDS:

1. To ensure that a well-designed greening and reinforced cross compliance represent a firm baseline for Pillar 2 environmental measures. This could help free up money for more efficient and targeted measures that benefit the environment and biodiversity.

*These baselines should be properly set and checked so as to create an equal level playing field for all farmers in Europe – special attention is needed on issues such as integrated pest management, water and soil. The Commission should urgently start to work on including the Water Framework Directive and Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive directly into cross compliance so that the uncertainty around what is the baseline and what is not, is removed.*

2. To ensure that the CAP is designed in a way which helps reach the EU Biodiversity Strategy goals by 2020. So far evidence shows that the agriculture target is the most problematic.

*In Pillar 2 this can only be done through proper funding of the Natura 2000 Network and the Priority 'Habitats and species' as defined in the Birds and Habitats Directives.*

3. To have a genuine system for tracking environmental spending. Only measures with clear environmental objectives and delivery can be included. Areas of Natural Constraints (ANCs) must not be counted as environmentally-beneficial measures as there are no environmental obligations or management requirements attached to the payments.

*At best, ANC has an indirect positive effect for biodiversity and the environment. However, in the worst case they are just income support which is pushing damaging intensification. The purpose of the ANC payments – to fight against abandonment or compensate farmers to work in more difficult areas – remains difficult to justify when compared to the direct income support of the first pillar. At best it is proof of the duality of the CAP where Pillar 1 is a driver for large and intensified farms and Pillar 2 a way to counter this*

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<sup>2</sup> Rural Development Regulation, Art. 8



*drive. This duality should be ended and a targeted instrument should be devised which supports extensive farming systems that provide high environmental value but are not economically viable.*

4. To ensure proper monitoring of the Rural Development schemes' delivery.

*It is not possible to know if investments in rural development are really delivering benefits for biodiversity without this evaluation.*

**Conclusion:** Europe needs to take a proper look at the whole of its agricultural policy and how it is working together or against environmental commitments and priorities. Even if Rural Development can be a large part of the answer and has the potential to play a positive role in many parts of Europe, the figures unfortunately show adjustments are necessary for this policy to truly deliver towards its objectives. It is now clear that this reformed CAP still has a long way to go before it can be called green.

#### **THE FRENCH PROVENCE-ALPES-COTE D'AZUR REGION NEEDS:**

A more ambitious RDP to actually allow a change and adaptation of usual agricultural practices, especially in the area of management of water resources.

#### **SOURCES:**

EC Factsheet for 2014-2020 Rural development programme for Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-development-2014-2020/country-files/fr/factsheet-paca\\_fr.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-development-2014-2020/country-files/fr/factsheet-paca_fr.pdf)

The data in this factsheet is based on the first version of the Rural Development Programme in France

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